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JEAN

A Novel

by

Tate W. Peek

B.A., Montana State University, 1920

Presented in partial fulfillment of the
requirement for the degree of Mas-
ter of Arts.

Montana State University

1947

Approved:

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JEAN

CHAPTER I

Jean was a biological accident.

"You could a-knocked me down with a feather, JOHN Boone," Mary Taylor told the doctor the day after the child was born. "I never expected to have another baby--no more than the Judgment Day!"

She was to repeat those words hundreds of times during the next few years. Actually, Mary was a little over forty, but she had come to consider herself an old woman.

"Haw-haw!" the doctor rumbled from the depths of his whiskers. "The ol' stork would have his little joke, Mary. But she's a fine gal--a fine gal."

He turned to Judson Taylor, who stood apologetically in the doorway. "Dang my duodenum, Jud, you look like you'd been caught stealin' sheep or somethin' -- haw-haw!"

"I reckon I'll have to perk up a bit at that, Doc," Judson said, "or the child will be takin' me for her granddaddy."

But the words did not carry conviction; the smile which accompanied them was forced, self conscious.

The doctor stamped out to his buggy still chuckling. "Dam' good joke on both of 'em," he told Ol' Prince as he unhitched the horse. "They were jest settin' around waitin' to die -- haw-haw!"

Prince tossed his head in agreement; he was the doctor's 'yes-man'.

"The Lord willed it thataway--He sent that child for a

purpose," Mary stated frequently and emphatically thereafter. "It's not for me to grumble."

Not that she welcomed the baby's advent, or a reversion to the duties of active motherhood. Already a grandmother, with her three grown-up children married and settled in life, Mary felt there was something a little indecent in her having another child. But she had had one--and she did not believe, as the doctor had said, that it was one of the stork's little jokes. Mary did not hold with the theory of biological accidents of birth. Children were sent by God, for a purpose--and in this case, the purpose was obvious to her. Instead of biology it was theology--simple cause and effect.

Because Eve had eaten the Forbidden Fruit, God had said to her: "In sorrow thou shalt bring forth children." They were Eve's penalty for Original Sin--and woman's penalty for any repetitions of it. But they were also woman's opportunity to atone here on earth for the repetitions. Hence, Mary felt that if she evaded one jot or tittle of her mother's responsibility to the child, her punishment would be transferred to the Hereafter. She would not evade it. However, the entire matter, she felt, was strictly between her and the Lord....

"Eugenie Anna Taylor" was the name Mary wrote in the old family Bible. But presently she shortened the Eugenie to 'Genie. "Jean" was an innovation of the child's own, which came several years later. The first two names were perpetuated only in the Bible record--amid a worthy fellowship of Alviras, Matildas, and Samanthas....

To Judson Taylor, now past fifty, the coming of little Jean was neither biological nor theological. It was a meaningless caprice of a blind, purposeless destiny. A destiny which had decreed for him more years of stolid plodding, with his nose to the eternal grindstone of 'makin' a livin''. Why couldn't it have let him grow old in peace?

When the doctor had gone, Judson continued to stand in the doorway, looking at Mary and the child.... Both seemed to be asleep now. Mary would be snoring presently. He saw the familiar lines of her face, for once more suggestive of weariness than of querulousness.... His thoughts turned back through the years.... He remembered that since manhood--early manhood--he had made for himself only one major decision, and even then Mary had determined his choice....

What would have happened, he wondered, if he had stayed in Montana thirty years ago--as his brother Sam had wanted him to do--and had started to practice law? Would his life have been different? It would have been without Mary--and now he could not visualize a life without her.... And he could not endure the thought of such a life when he had made his decision, he remembered. That was why he had gone back to Boonville....

He had hoped to practice law in Boonville. He had rented an office and had hung out his shingle--he still had the old office, over the post office....

But Mary had been engaged to another man when he got back from the West.... He had won her though, had married her--and she had demanded security as the price. She had made him abandon

his law practice, his hope of entering politics, to accept the job of county clerk and recorder. That would give them a "livin' she had said. It had--for over thirty years.

Mary had been a good wife, was still one, as she understood wifehood, he thought....But she had never dreamed dreams, or shared his dreams. She called them 'jest settin' around moonin'.' Maybe that was all they ever would have amounted to anyway....

The older children--Ransone, Fred, and Marion--had always been Mary's children. They had never shared anything with him. They had been dutiful, obedient, stolid--not Taylors, but Metcalfes. Would this one, too, be Mary's child--a Metcalfe?

He had tried to tell the boys and Marion about the Taylors. About Old Sam, who was a pioneer in western North Carolina after the Revolution. About Polly Oxford, who had married him and had gone to live with him in his frontier cabin--who alone one night with her baby, when Sam was away, had burned the puncheons from the cabin floor to keep a panther from coming down the chimney--About old Uncle Hudable--and how the wolves had chased him one night, had torn the tail out of his flaxen nightshirt....

But Mary had said that people weren't 'God-fearin' an' civilized' in those days.... The children had been more interested in the Metcalfes--in their big South Carolina plantation... Would this one by that way too?

From the old bassinet--made of white and red hickory splits, handed down through three generations of Taylors--came a slight whimper. Mary awoke with a start, leaned over to adjust the covers around the child.

"There, there--go to sleep now," she murmured drowsily. Then she noticed Judson, still in the doorway. "What are you a-starin' at, Jud?" she demanded. "Did you remember to tell the good-for-nothin' Zeb McHone to feed an' water the cow--an' to milk 'her?"

"Yes, I told him, Mary."

"Well--I reckon Hagar didn't bring in the eggs. She never does--unless you tell 'er."

"I--I'm afraid I didn't," Judson murmured.

"The Lord only knows what would become o' this place, if I wasn't here to see after it," Mary complained. "I reckon it 'ould jest go to wrack an' ruin."

Hagar Galloway, who had been 'doin'' for Mary during her confinement, appeared behind Judson. "I heard you say 'aigs', Misses Taylor," she whined. "I brung 'em in already--they was a dozen an' three. That ol' dominecker hen in the hoss-trough--the one in the far stall--she seemed kinda like she wanted to git to settin'."

"Did you pull 'her off the nest?" Mary asked.

"No--seemed like she'd already addled the aigs. I jest let 'er set, Misses Taylor."

Mary sniffed. Hagar shuffled her feet, inviting further discussion of the 'dominecker' hen. But Mary ignored her, looked at Judson. "Did you call for the mail, Jud? I've been expectin' a letter from Ransome."

"No, I--I jest forgot to," he confessed. "I'll go back an' get it before supper."

"Seems like you don't ever try to remember anything," Mary accused fretfully.

Without reply Judson took his broad-brimmed hat from the hall table, shuffled down the street to the post office.

He was getting like the Galloways, he thought--shiftless, good-for-nothing.... Mary had been correct about the letter from Ransome. Even before he took it from the mail box, Judson knew it would be addressed to her. The 'children' never wrote him; they always sent their 'affection' in Mary's letters.

But there was another letter in the box, addressed to him. The handwriting told him it was from his brother Sam. Judson found himself wondering if he had answered the last previous one--remembered that he had, a year or so ago. He climbed the rickety stairs to his old law office over the post office--Mary could never understand why he kept it--and opened the letter.

Although their correspondence was of the semi-decade variety, there was a strong bond of sympathy between the brothers. As he grew older, Judson had come to idealize Sam, to respect him for the success he had made in his chosen way of life. Sam, on the other hand, always wrote as though Judson were still the younger brother he had last seen in Helena, Montana, thirty years before. As he read, Judson warmed to the familiar, stilted phrases:

"Dear Brother:

I take my pen in hand one again after more than five years. Sally and me hope that you and Mary are well and doing well. We are about as usual, but we are both getting along in years. All three of your children have married since I wrote you last.

Jean,

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They remembered us with announcements. Sally sent them presents.

"She stopped off in Denver to see Marion and her husband last summer. She says he is a fine man and Marion is a fine girl. Sally talked some of writing Mary she had seen them, but I thought maybe she hadn't better. Mary has never written her, and might think that Sally is stepping out of her place. Women are strange.

"Sally and me will always grive over the loss of our little boy. When the doctor said she could never have another, we talked some of adopting one. Maybe we will someday. Now you are a grandfather, Jud. I envy you.

"As you and Mary are not tied down with a family now, I am writing to suggest that you come out here and see us. Sally wants to know more of my folks. Hers are all dead. You and your family are the only ones we have left. And we are all getting along in years.

"Now, Sally and me have done pretty well with the cattle and the ranches, and we have got nobody to spend it on. We want you to use a thougant dollars that is just lying in the bank, doing nobody any good. If you will use it, it will give both of us a lot of pleasure.

"Now, Jud, Sally and me are going to be mighty hurt if you don't come. You can stop off and see your children on the way. We want you to come mighty bad.

"As ever, your affectionate brother,

"Sam Taylor".

When he had finished reading the letter, Judson dabbed at his eyes with his handkerchief. Good old Sam--the best brother a man ever had....But he could not accept Sam's offer. Mary would have refused, even if the new baby had not provided her with an excuse--and had not given him a face-saving one. Sally had been the daughter of a saloon-keeper. Mary would 'have no truck' with her--money or no money. But surely she would write Sally now, Judson thought. It was the least Mary could do....

When he gave her Ransome's letter, she did not comment on his delay to read Sam's; but her sniff told him she had noticed it. Judson sighed.

As she read her letter he glanced at the bassinet, saw that the child was awake. She lay wide-eyed, gazing at him. With a feeling of embarrassment he waved a tentative finger at her, but the focus of her eyes did not change. Judson decided she had not been looking at him after all.

Her little face had the usual beet-red coloring and dried-apple appearance of the very young baby, he noticed. Then, as he looked at her, his expression changed. Judson saw that the child had the dark hair and eyes of the Taylors!

The other children had been blond Metcalfes--the 'little-eyes Metcalfes' the family had been called, for generations. But this mite of humanity was a Taylor! Because she was, would she turn to him--as the others had turned to Mary?

"Ransome says their baby's cuttin' teeth," Mary told him presently. "This one will be her aunt--an' Fred's an' Marion's

children's too. It don't seem respectable, her bein' younger'n any of 'em."

"What difference does it make?"

"They'll never look up to her," Mary stated. "Not the way they should. It'll work a hardship on the child, Jud Taylor--you mark my words."

"Oh, it won't do that," he denied. "Aunts an' uncles don't mean much any more, Mary."

"Well, mine did," she declared. "My Aunt Lucinda was one o' the smartest women in South Carolina--an' she married a man that wasn't worth the powder an' lead to blow his brains out! He went an' drunk himself to death--had delirium tremens an' saw the ghost of a man he'd shot in a duel, they say--an' she wore black for 'im to the end o' her days."

"That didn't seem right smart--her marryin' a feller like that."

"Well, she was smart," Mary stated emphatically. "I've heard Aunt Alvira say she was a better doctor than her own-born father--if she'd been a-mind to practice it. But no woman's got any brains when it comes to men. I reckon God jest made 'em thataway."

Judson did not care to argue the question. "I got a letter from Brother Sam, Mary," he told her.

"What does he say?"

"He--He wants us to come out there to see him an' Sally. He wants to send us a thousand dollars."

"I'll have no money from Sam Taylor an' his dance-hall

wife!" she exclaimed. "An' I wouldn't take one step into her house--not if it was the last place in the world!"

"I'm not askin' you to," Judson said. "But we can write an' thank 'em for the offer. Sam's my brother, Mary."

"You can do the writin' then," she retorted with a sniff. "I never have written 'er--an' I never will."

II

That night Judson went down to his old law office to answer the letter. The baby of course furnished an immediate excuse for rejecting Sam's offer; but it did not excuse Mary's failure to write. Her refusal to do so filled him with a deep sense of humiliation. He knew that Sally Moret, before she married Sam, had been no dance-hall girl. She had been a young woman of culture and refinement. But it did not good to tell Mary that....

Impoverished by the Civil War, Raoul Moret--like many another Southerner--had gone West to recoup his fortunes. He had done so by opening a saloon and gambling hall at Fort Benton, then the head of navigation on the Missouri River. Later he had sold the place and had invested his money in cattle. But in the meantime his daughter Sally, the only surviving member of his family, had grown up and had joined him in Fort Benton. Sam and Judson, on their way to Montana Territory, had met the Morets--and Sam had married the girl. She had gone to live with him in a sod-covered cabin by the Missouri. She had stood by him through good and bad--she had been all that Sam had asked for in a wife....

But he himself had been shocked at the time, because Sam

had married the daughter of a saloon keeper, Judson remembered... He had been pretty sure of himself then. As a university graduate who had been admitted to the bar, he had prided himself on the 'integrity of his principles'....But his frozen ideologies had thawed with the years; the immutable values had not proved them-selves; even right and wrong, he had come to see, were always conditioned by time, place, and circumstance. The realization had left his personal philosophy in an almost fluid state of bewilderment....Who was he, Judson thought--or who was Mary--to judge Sally Taylor because her father had been a saloon keeper?

Before he went home that night, Judson had filled several pages with his precise script. The missive was an apologia.

"Mary's baby was born yesterday," he wrote. "She and the child are as well as can be expected. It is a girl. We are both pretty old to be having another child, but I feel Better about this one than I did. She is going to be a Taylor. The others are Metcalfes. I hope we can bring her up right. I want her to do the things I've failed to do--the things our other children have never cared about. I want her to be a woman of refinement and polish, like Sally.

"Not that I'm complaining about the others. But they've lacked something the Old Taylors had. I reckon I've lacked it too. I want this child to look for more than just being respectable and getting ahead. I want her to know the things I've wanted to know--and didn't know how to learn them--or was afraid to learn them. I don't want her to be afraid of living....

"Mary has had plenty of education, but she's never cared to read much of anything except the Bible; and she's never thought about what that means. I don't want this child to grow up religious like Mary is. It closes people's eyes. The College here hasn't changed a bit since the War, I reckon. The people of Boonville think they're the only good people in the world. This place is the only good one in the world. All the rest are dens of iniquity. I don't want this child to think that...

"The old place hasn't changed much. I had the porch fixed up a few years ago, and the roof has been re-shingled. The trees are a lot taller than they were when you were here. The one you fell out of and broke your arm rotted inside and had to be cut down. The boxwoods are higher than a man's head now. This town has grown a little. People come here to spend the summer.

"The old College Chapel, where the Yankee cavalry kept their horses during the War, was torn down last year. They'll be begging money for a new one now, I reckon. We ought to have a public school here. There's some talk of it...."

After he had finished the letter Judson added a postscript "I reckon Mary won't be getting around to writing until the baby is older. She never was much of a hand to write, anyway."

.....

Mary Taylor was a snob. Not that she believed in an aristocracy of wealth or birth or social position. Kings and potentates, all who occupied positions of high rank and great wealth, were definitely and justly relegated to the fires and brimstone of a hard-shell Baptist hell, in the twin parables

of Lazarus and Dives and the Camel and the needle's eye. The Bible said such people would sizzle--hence, sizzle they must. There were no half-baked measures in Mary's orthodoxy.

Her snobbishness was strictly theological--she believed in 'predestination' and 'The Elect'. Those who were predestined to be 'saved' would be--no matter what they did. The question of 'free will', a stumbling block to thousands, she had answered comfortably: Those who were 'elected' were given the right kind of free will. But Adam and Eve's horticultural experiment had introduced sin into the world; and all men were prone to sin, an Elect as well as the Condemned. The difference was that the Elect could repent here on earth and be punished here. The Condemned could atone only in Hell. To Mary, the Elect were the Aristocracy of God.

She never dreamed of questioning the Bible, nor would she tolerate such questioning in her presence. "Thou shalt not touch the ark of the Lord thy God--even when it totters," was Jehovah's admonition to the Hebrews. It has been the safeguard of orthodoxy down through the Ages--a bulwark to insure the mental security of the fanatic. Mary permitted no jeopardy of her mental security.

But she did not eschew the services of Dr. Boone, an avowed agnostic. Mary endured his iconoclasm, which he practiced as regularly--and as jovially--as he practiced medicine. Even his profanity--he swore 'like a mule-skinner', on any and all occasions--Mary chose to condone or ignore.

"John Boone is a wicked, wicked man. His gray hairs should shame him," she would say. But for some reason she chose to

consider him a member of the Elect--though a sadly errant one. "He'll see the light yet before he dies--you mark my words," she would say. "But he'll suffer. The Lord jest won't let him go unpunished."

Actua lly, Mary was fond of the old doctor, as was almost every one else in Boonville. For over thirty years his genial gruff voice and sympathetic understanding had relieved fears and calmed hysteria during countless crises of birth, sickness, and death. He understood Boonville as no one else did. He was the one person in the town could do and say what he pleased. Even his personal morality--held by many to be questionable--had ceased to be a matter of discussion. If he chose to solace an attractive and lonesome widow now and then, most of Boonville figured that was his own business.

His profanity was notoriously blood-curdling during delivery cases. Perhaps the doctor wished to afford the over-repressed Boonville matrons a vicarious outlet for the pangs of child-birth. But the vitriol of his irony bit deepest when poured on the shams of religion. Of a Sunday morning he might go to church himself--or he might sit in his buggy in front of the drug store and point to the Boonvilleites trooping toward the little edifice at the edge of the College campus.

"There they go--takin' out a little more fire insurance this mornin', haw-haw!" he would chuckle. "Seems like Ol' Samp Ramsey would jest about have a paid-up policy, after sixty year' o' church-goin'. Should a-died fifty-nine year' ago. Then he could a-beat the policy!"

The drug-store yokels, most of whom 'got religion' yearly during the revival meetings--just as a matter of precaution--would shudder at the sacrilege. But they admired the doctor for 'flirtin' with hell-fire thataway'. To them his attitude was the essence of heroism.

Strangely, it was Judson--who rarely went to church--rather than Mary, who resented the doctor's attitude toward religion. Actually, however, the doctor's attitude was a confirmation of Judson's own doubts--and he didnot want them confirmed. The idea of a blind, mechanistic, universe--purposeless for the individual and with no goal except death and oblivion--was abhorrent to him.

Yet on every hand he saw what he believed to be evidences of blindness: Little Tommy Whitt had been struck by lightning while stacking hay--and his drunken, thieving brother-in-law on the wagon beside the stack had been uninjured; the West boys, good, wholesome youngsters who had never harmed anyone in their lives, had been drowned while swimming in the French Broad River; Nancy Travis, a strict church-goer with a family of children, had been burned to death because her good-for-nothing husband had dropped a lighted cigarette in the cellar. Such happenings were hard for Judson to reconcile with the idea of a deity who meddled in human affairs.

Dr. Boone declared the idea was a colossal hoax on humanity....

III

A few days after Jean was born the doctor stopped at the court house to see Judson. "Well, how's that gal o' yours?" he asked. "Must be about ready to start dancin' an' carryin' on with the men-folks, ain't she?"

Judson smiled. "She's comin' right along, Doc."

"Could you manage to be in that dust-bin you call an office this evenin', Jud? I've got a little matter o' business to 'tend to."

Judson promised to be there at five o'clock; and the doctor stamped out of the building--shouting to the sheriff that Jud Taylor was peddling moonshine licker at the county poor farm.

Dr. Boone was a few minutes late for their appointment. "Had to stop at Rufe Johnson's again," he explained. "Rufe's never done a dam' thing in his life but set around an' whittle. So now, when he's an old man, he ups an' tries to lift a wagon box two strong men couldn't budge. Expects me to patch 'im up--so he can whittle for another fifty years. Dang it, Jud, sometimes I wish I was a cow doctor."

This, Judson realized, was the doctor's way of introducing the business matter. "You do a heap o' good though, Doc," he said mildly. "Folks jest couldn't get along without you."

"Maybe I do--maybe I do," the doctor admitted. "But sometimes I jest naturally figger this county 'ould be better off if I let most of 'em die. Take that Sim Moody, that got knifed the other night over on Shelton Laurel. Nate Rice done it, they say. Sim was shinin' up to Nate's low-down wife,

I reckon. Anyway--I sewed Sim up an' kept 'im from bleedin' to death. But he'll knife or shoot Mace now--an' the county'll have the expense o' hanging him, buryin' Mace, an' feedin' his wife an' young-'uns.

"Damn it, Jud, I could a-saved the tax-payers enough to build a schoolhouse, by lettin' Sim die!" he exclaimed.

"Criminal carelessness-nothin' less. There ain't nothin' in the statute books to cover it though....

"But I drug you up here to help me make a will," he ended abruptly.

Judson was mildly surprised. The doctor was unmarried, and so far as Boonville knew, had no living relatives. He owned the house he had lived in for the past thirty years, paid good wages to his Negro housekeeper and her shiftless husband who did odd jobs around the place, and lived on the same scale as the rest of the town--collecting fees from those who could pay, forgetting to bill those who couldn't. Boonville long since had ceased to wonder at his seeming lack of outside connections; and a will, Judson realized, might mean that he did have them.

"Do you want me to make it out for you, Doc?" he questioned

"No, I want it to be one o' them what-you-call-it wills--holographic, I guess it is. They're legal, ain't they?"

"Yes, a holographic will is perfectly legal," Judson assured him. "You'll want a form to go by, I reckon. Let me see--

He thumbed through a calf-bound volume for a few moments without bothering to consult the index. "Here you are--this is the form, Doc," he said. "If it's in your own handwritin', you don't even need a witness. Jest follow that form an' sign it.

Better take the book along with you."

He tore a strip of paper from an old letterhead and put it in the volume as a marker. "There--there isn't anything wrong with you, is there, Doc?" he hesitated.

Dr. Boone chuckled. "Hell, Jud--I'm so damned healthy I ought to be breakin' rocks for the county, 'stead o' dishin' out pills for lazy ol' men an' hysterical women," he said.

He wiped the dust from the book's covers with his handkerchief and placed it beside his medicine case, sat looking at Judson's framed diploma from the University of North Carolina yellowed parchment, with its Latin text and many signatures faded and spotted.

"I've got one o' them things," he said presently. "It's from the London College o' Physicians an' Surgeons....But the name on it ain't Boone, Jud."

Judson was surprised and bewildered. "You mean--it was given to somebody else, Doc?"

Dr. Boone chuckled again. "It was given to me," he stated. "But my name ain't Boone--not in England. It's legal enough in this country though, I reckon."

"I jest--don't rightly understand you, Doc," Judson said. "Do you mean--you're an Englishman?"

"I was born an' brought up there, got my schoolin' there," the doctor told him. "But I've been a-votin' lawfully here for the past thirty year', Jud. I'm a naturalized citizen, as John Preston Boone...."

"I'm tellin' you this," he continued presently, "Because

I want to make that will legal--over there, as well as here. In England my name was John Sullivan Boone-Preston--get it?"

Judson nodded.

"Well, can you write it out for me--jest the beginnin' and the endin'--so it'll be legal in both places?"

Judson fumbled in a drawer of his desk for a sheet of paper. "Jest a minute, Doc," he said.

"No hurry," the other grinned. "I ain't figgerin' on dyin' for quite a spell yet."

Judson wrote for several moments, then handed the doctor what he had written. "'I, John Sullivan Boone-Preston, M. D.,'" Dr. Boone read, "'a naturalized American citizen under the name of John Preston Boone, M. D., and known by that name in this locality for the past thirty years--' Yeah, that's it--an' signed the same way. I can figger the rest out," he told Judson

"An' there's another thing--I want you to keep this will for me, Jud," he added. "I'll seal it in an envelope, an' I want you to put it in that safe o' yours up at the house, if I drop off before you do--which is more than likely--I want you to open the envelope an' follow the directions. They'll be full an' ample. If you go first--the envelope'll have my name on it.

"Will you promise to do that, Jud?"

"Yes, Doc--I'll be glad to. I'll follow the directions--if you go first--to the best of my ability."

"Then--that's that," the doctor said. "An' I'm relyin' on you to say nothin' about this--to Mary, or anybody else."

"Naturally, you may do so," Judson said a little stiffly. "I'm not in the habit of--"

"Hell, I know you ain't," Dr. Boone chuckled. "But Mary's human--an' a woman. She might see that envelope an' wonder about it--an' ask about it. You'll wonder too--but you won't ask about it. You'll jest figger it's my own private business--which it is."

"There's--there's one thing I'd like to know though, Doc," Judson hesitated.

"What's that, Jud?"

"Well," Judson questioned, "how is it that you--bein' an Englishman--talk jest like the rest of us here?"

Dr. Boone haw-hawed. "Dang my ol' duodenum, is that all?" he grinned. "Well, I've been in this dam' country thirty-five year'--an' I always was pretty fair at dialects. Now I figger I jest naturally speak yourn a durned sight better than you folks do, Jud!"

He delivered the sealed envelope next day, and Judson locked it in his ~~saf~~ safe. Neither of the men spoke of the incident again until Jean was a grown woman.

IV

The child grew from babyhood to an active little girlhood unmindful of the fact that she had been 'the stork's little joke. And before she was three Jean had shocked all Mary's preconceptions as to how the well-trained infant should deport itself. The child did not nurse or sleep as Mary's other three had done; her teeth came early; she could sit alone, creep, and walk far ahead of schedule; and she was constantly doing the unexpected.

"I do declare, that child beats anything I ever saw!"

Mary told her sister Phronie, while Jean was still in the infant stage. "What do you think she went an' done this mornin'?"

"What did she do, Mary?"

"She went an' crawled up them back stairs, I tell you--clean to the landin'," Mary stated. "Then she started roalin' down 'em. An' if I hadn't a-run an' caught 'er, the Lord knows that child would a-killed herself! I spanked 'er--an' it wasn't five minutes till she was tryin' to climb 'em again!"

Phronie murmured, "Land sakes, Mary!"

"I tell you, Phronie--I'm a-goin' to have a time with that child," Mary declared. "I never saw the beat of her--not in my born days. She's goin' to have a temper--jest like Jud's mother. An' I'm afraid to think what it'll do to 'er--I'm afraid, afraid...."

Phronie nodded her sympathy. "Shockin', Mary--shockin', shockin'!"

"An' Jud Taylor's a-spoilin' that child, Phronie," Mary stated. "If he don't stop it, as I've been a-tellin' 'im to do, she'll come to no good end--you jest mark my words!"

To Judson, however, the child was as near perfection as a mortal could be. She was plump, healthy, smiling--all dimples. And when she gurgled and kicked and squealed like a vigorous cherub, he would stand over her and marvel at her infant precocity. He was sure that there never had been another like her.

Mary frequently took occasion to remind him that he had

not shown such interest in their other children, but he refused to discuss the matter with her. And believing as she did that the child had been sent to her as a punishment for sin, Mary looked for--and saw--the hand of predestination already beckening little Jean toward the 'slippery, downward road'....

After she was grown up, Jean could not remember having learned to read. She knew that Judson had taught her, however. Her earliest memories were of lying out in the yard under the big walnut tree with the Sunday supplement of the "Atlanta Constitution"--of pouring over the 'Uncle Remus' comics and those of 'Si' and his mule 'Maude'. She would spell out the captions until she came to an unfamiliar word; then she would scamper to Judson, dozing with the rest of the paper, in his old rocking chair.

"What's this, Papa--what's this?" she would demand, breathless with anticipation. Judson would awake with a start, adjust his spectacles, and would make her read the sentence up to the troublesome word. Then she would make a great to-do of trying to pronounce it.

"P-o-r, 'por'," she would say, with exaggerated grimaces and signs, "c-u, 'sue'--"

"No, child," Judson would tell her gravely, "c-u spells 'cue'."

"Por-cu--" Jean would repeat, and "p-i-n-e, 'pine'!" she would cry triumphantly. "What is a porcupine, Papa? What is it?"

Judson would show her the pictures of one, along with those of 'Brer Rabbit'.

"But what are the quills for, Papa?"

"Oh, it jest bristles 'em up, when somethin' tries to hurt it," he would tell her. "Run along now--an' let Papa read."

"Doesn't it stick itself with 'em, when it lies down to sleep?" she would insist. "Doesn't it ever sleep, Papa? Doesn't it?"

"Oh, it jest folds 'em up, honey--like in this picture," he would explain. And he would chuckles to himself as she scampered back to gloat over the adventures of the rabbit and the porcupine.

At first, Mary also was a target for the child's incessant questions. But Mary did not recognize them as signs of a healthy child's curiosity. Because they continued from morning to night, and because she did not know the answers to many of them, the questions annoyed her.

"Do go an' set down, child," she would say crossly. "Can't you give your mother a minute's peace? Go an' set down--right this minute!"

And Jean would climb into her little rocker, would kick her heels against the rounds forlornly--until Mary snapped at her: "Keep them feet still! How many times do I have to tell you?"

The feet would stop, and presently Jean would pipe faintly: "But why shouldn't I ask questions, Mamma? Why shouldn't I?"

"Oh--keep still!" Mary would exclaim. "If you don't quit pesterin' me, I'll jest shut you up in that closet--an' let the Bad Man come an' git you! You're a wicked, disobedient child. An' you're a-drivin' me to mortal distraction!"

Jean would not speak again for maybe five minutes. She would rock furiously, her thoughts a whirlwind. And Mary, grimly sewing or knitting in her own rocker, would be startled presently by another question.

"But who is the Bad Man, Mamma? Why does he get little girls? What does he do with them--eat them?"

Now Mary never used the words 'damn', 'devil', or 'hell' except for extreme emphasis. To her the words themselves were essentially evil. Hence, in her vocabulary the Devil had become the 'Bad Man'; Hell, the 'Bad Place'; and she said that people were 'condemned', rather than 'damned'. With her older children she had learned that a judicious use of the Bad Man and the Bad Place was an effective means of discipline, as well as a grounding in the fundamentals of her religion. With Jean, however, it worked otherwise.

"The Bad Man is a horrible--fiery--monster, child," she tried to explain. "He puts all the wicked thoughts into our minds. An' he lives in a place o' fire an' brimstone--the Bad Place--down under the earth. That's the place he takes people who are bad--"

"Does he get bad little boys, Mamma?"

"Yes--yes, child. The Bad Man gits everybody that's bad--boys an' girls, men an' women."

"But he hasn't got Little Alex, Mamma--you said he was bad!" the child cried excitedly--Little Alex was Phronie's 'youngest'. "An' you said Hagar was bad--she run away with somebody," Jean went on. "Why doesn't he get them, Mamma?"

"Never you mind--he'll git 'em in his own good time," Mary assured her--reminding herself mentally of 'little pitchers

But the child was not to be put off with vagaries.

"Will he get 'em tomorrow?"

"He will when they die--if not sooner," Mary stated.

"The wicked may prosper for a time, my child, But the Lord will punish 'em. He'll make 'em suffer for their sins--every one."

"Is the Lord the Bad Man, Mamma?"

"Don't you ever say a thing like that again, 'Genie Taylor!" Mary exclaimed. "The Lord--He is good an' righteous. His mercy is everlastin'. He--He suffers little children to come unto Him, an' forbids them not, child. An'--He forgives us for our sins."

But that was pretty complicated for Jean.

"If He forgives us--why does He let the Bad Man get us?" she asked. "Why doesn't He punish the Bad Man, Mamma?"

With an effort Mary kept the raveling threads of her patience from breaking. Here was sacrilege--her own child, daring to question the ways of the Lord. She would dig such questions from the child's mind--it was her bounden duty to do so--and she would plant instead a due reverence for His great and Holy Name....

"The Lord loves us, child," Mary said earnestly. "He so loved the world that He gave his only begotten Son--"

"What's 'onlybegotten', Mamma?"

"Hush--don't interrput!" Mary cried. "It means--to be born. But if you're jest goin' to keep on askin' questions--if you don't care about the Lord--"

"I do, Mamma!" the child exclaimed. "I want to know all about Him. Tell me about Him!"

Mary tried again--told her about heaven, with its gold-paved streets and its throngs of beautiful, singing angels, white-robed spirits with golden harps and crowns. She pictured the Lord, seated on His golden throne, giving life-everlasting to the righteous, condemning the wicked to everlasting fire--in the Bad Place, where the Bad Man ruled by divine indulgence.

"That was too much, even for Jean's credulity.

"But didn't the Lord make us all, Mamma--even the Bad Man?"

"Yes, child, I reckon He did."

"Then why, Mamma--why didn't He make us all good?" she cried. "Why didn't He make the Bad Man good? Why didn't He?"

The threads of Mary's patience snapped then. She called the child 'wicked', 'heedless', 'sinful'; and because she simply could not understand why she was all those terrible things, little Jean went out into the yard and cried....

But when Mary saw later that Jean was taking her questions to Judson--who tried at least to answer them--she resented the child's doing that too....

CHAPTER II

I

As she grew older Jean developed a passion for reading. Once past the primer stage she tried to read everything in sight--from the book of Bible Narratives Marion had sent her to the current serial novel running in the "Asheville Citizen". Most of it was beyond her understanding, of course; but the

child loved words. Their fascinating, mysterious cadences of sound stimulated her imagination to give them meanings of her own.

When she was old enough to go to Sunday School, Mary made her a new white dress. Wearing that--with a big, propellor-like bow of red ribbon tied to her hair--she started to the Primary Class. There Jean memorized long Bible texts, which were at the time as meaningless to her as the love stories in the 'Asheville Citizen'. But her proficiency in reciting them prompted her teacher to tell Judson and Mary she was a 'mighty smart little girl'--and stimulated Jean to bigger and better feats of memory.

One text in particular impressed her, however. It was Isaiah 53:6--"All we, like sheep, have gone astray; we have turned every one to his own way; and the Lord hath laid on Him the iniquity of us all."

It was easy for Jean to picture herself going astray--across a cool green desert, with palms in the background. And just before she reached the other side of the desert, where the Bad Man was hiding in the palms to seize her, the friendly looking 'Him' pictured on her lesson card always overtook her and brought her back.

But the 'iniquity of us all' presented a mental hurdle; and when she asked her teacher to remove it, Jean was still further bewildered--by being told that everybody was cursed because Adam and Eve had eaten the apple!

And why had the Lord laid on Him the iniquity of us all?

Jean was not very clear in her mind about the Lord. Everybody seemed to talk about Him in hushed tones, as though they were afraid of Him. And like the Bad Man He seemed to burn people and do other terrible things to them. She decided that her mother and Reverend Ponder must be mistaken about the Lord, for both had called him a 'loving father'. She knew that the kindly looking shepherd on her card--also called 'Him'--was Jesus; and she knew all about Jesus, from her Bible stories. But the others kept confusing her, by saying that He was the Son of God--of the Lord....

She liked Jesus--but she couldn't love the Lord. She was afraid of Him. Instinctively, she felt that He and the Bad Man were identical....

Long before Jean was born, Judson gradually had relapsed into 'backslidin''. But now that the child was old enough to attend Sunday School, he felt that he should set her an example by going to church. The Reverend Ponder's sermons always left him with a sense of morbid futility, however. Judson decided that he was a failure at Christianity too....

At first he had tried to follow the preacher's halting, ranting discourse, in the hope that he might glean from it some of the 'Peach which passeth understanding'. But Reverend Ponder's ideas were few. His sermons consisted chiefly of Bible quotations, dovetailed clumsily into a pointless harangue on some phase of Baptist dogma. And presently Judson stopped listening to the sermons, letting his own thoughts shape a pattern for themselves.

Ol' Joah Ponder, standing up there in the pulpit, prating

about Christ's having died for sinners--making a life work of parroting the same stilted phrases--until they had petrified into an illiterate ritual of inanity--a soporific for morons... Judson knew that he was not a 'sinner'; he had never consciously done a dishonorable act in his life; he had never been malicious, profligate, irreligious, or profane. He had been...merely a failure...

He knew that few of the congregation around him had been 'wicked'. They were poor, shiftless, lazy, ignorant; or they were poor, frugal, hard-working--and still ignorant. They had done the best they knew, most of them....Why had it been necessary for Christ to die for the--for himself? Had His death atoned for their ignorance--for his failure? Actually, had Christ 'saved' the world? Or....was He too a failure?

Judson could not answer his own questions; but there must be answers to them, he thought. Somewhere, there must be great and fundamental truths which would stand the test of questioning Truths which a man could accept without knowing that he was a mental coward....

Would the child seated beside him, her hands crossed primly on her lap like Mary's, flounder through life as he had done? Or would she--like Ol' Sam Taylor, like Brother Sam--choose her own meanings, achieve her own purposes?

Mary had done that, Judson realized. She had shaped her own life--and his. She had even shaped her religion to her own mental needs. For a long time he had known that Mary was mentally ruthless. Her own opinions were inviolate; she would

crush contradictory ones as readily as she would kill a rattlesnake....

But she was a good wife and mother, a good Christian woman, anyway, he told himself. Mary was--what she wanted to be.... Mary, Judson came to realize, was a success....

II

Jean was not allowed to play with the other Boonville children. This was partly due to the fact that the prolific Runions had moved from across the street when she was three years old, and had been succeeded by a childless old couple, the Tilsons. But Jean's isolation was chiefly because Mary feared the child might be morally or spiritually contaminated.

"I'm not a-goin' to have that child runnin' wild with them good-for-nothin' young-'uns, Jud Taylor," Mary declared. "The Lord only knows what meanness they might teach 'er, an' she's trouble enough as it is. I reckon she can play with Little Alex when Phronie brings him over. But I've my doubts about him bein' any too nice--even if he is my own-born sister's child."

Judson was inclined to agree with her. "When 'Genie's alone, she'll be in good company, anyway," he said.

But Dr. Boone, who usually drove past the Taylor house several times a day, had a different viewpoint. One morning he stopped Ol' Prince and shouted to Mary, who happened to be on the porch: "What's the idea o' lockin' your front gate, Mary? Ain't afeard of Indians, are you?"

"I'm a-keepin' that child where she belongs," Mary

stated. "An' if other people--"

His guffaw drowned the rest of it. "What you need is a good, ol'-fashioned penitentiary, Mary," he told her. "Then the little gal couldn't even see out!"

"John Boone, I'd thank you to mind your own business!"

The doctor snorted. "That child's my business! Dam' it to hell, Mary!--everyone in this town is. But--" he hesitated, then went on: "If you had the natural-born gumption of a guinea-pig, you'd open that gate an' let the child learn to be a human bein'--with other human bein's."

Mary was furious. She flounced into the house and slammed the door. Dr. Boone rumbled a few choice oaths to Ol' Prince and drove on down the street. But for several days thereafter, if she happened to be on the porch or in the yard when he passed, he would shout: "Still up on your high-hoss, Mary? Better open that gate--Haw-haw!"

Mary would sniff disdainfully, would turn her back to him.

After Jean was born, the doctor had formed the habit of 'jest droppin' in' at the Taylors occasionally after supper, for a friendly chat and smoke with Judson. When Mary and Jean had finished the dishes, they usually joined the twonmen. Jean would stand waiting for the formal exchange of courtesies which always took place between the doctor and herself; when they were concluded, she would bid them all a prim good-night and trot off to bed. Then Dr. Boone usually abandoned his chat with Judson for an argument with Mary, Judson assuming the role of non-participating auditor.

A few evenings after the incident of the locked gate,

Dr. Boone stamped up the walk and joined Judson on the porch. "Jest dropped up to see if Mary's still wantin' to bite my head off," he told Judson, with a grin.

"Sit down, Doc--sit down," Judson said. "Mary's gettin' the child to bed. She'll be out in a minute, I expect."

They talked politics for a while; then Mary came out on the porch. The sniff which augmented her "Good evenin', John Boone" was the only indication that she remembered their tiff. The doctor took the conversation in hand immediately.

"I was jest tellin' Jud that somethin' ought to be done about the kids in this town, Mary," he said. "They're a-runnin' around them streets after dark like a passel o' hoot-owls."

Judson glanced at the doctor; he had mentioned neither {kids' nor 'hoot-owls'.

"Ain't it the truth?" Mary assented. "I've said the same thing, John Boone--an' I'll say it again. It's a shame an' a disgrace."

"Jest can't figger what the next generation's comin' to," the doctor went on. "Dang my ol' hide, Jud--you know that ol' rack-o8-bones Cal Starke calls a horse. Last night a pack o' them kids took an' painted 'Use Sloan's Liniment' on 'im, in letters a foot high--haw-haw! Our esteemed an' disrespected constabule, Jess Wilcox, is workin' on the case, I understand."

Judson chuckled; Mary gave him a look of disapproval.

"It's no laughin' matter, I tell you, Jud Taylor," she stated. "When the parents o' this town jest stand by an' let their young-'uns do things like that, I say it's come to a pretty pass--a pretty pass!"

"You're right, Mary--a pretty pass," the doctor said solemnly. "An' that ain't all, either. I saw Josh Ponder's kid today--you both know the one I mean. That little Elmer. Not a day over eight--if he's a day. An' his father a preacher, too--"

"Mary cut in: "What did he do, John Boone?"

"If I told you what that kid went an' done, I reckon you jest couldn't believe it," the doctor declared. "But I'll say this, Mary--maybe you won't like it, but I'll say it anyway: If Josh Ponder's own children got the trainin' they should git--if he took 'em off to one side an' talked to 'em the way a father should--little Elmer wouldn't a-done what I seen an' heard today--"

Mary was a-quiver with curiosity. "Land sakes!" she exclaimed, "What did he do, John Boone?"

The doctor hesitated. "Well, I don't rightly know whether I should tell what he done--to a woman, Mary. But I'll tell Jud, when I see 'im alone."

"You can jest tell it now!" she asserted vigorously. "If things like that are a-goin' on in this community--if Josh Ponder's child--!"

"Well," he warned her, "it ain't exactly what you'd call a nice story, Mary."

"Go on!" she snapped. "Tell it, John Boone!"

The doctor grinned. "I reckon you know the Meadowses' ol' bull, Jud," he said. "The critter shouldn't be allowed around her. Wouldn't be, if this town was civilized. He's always gittin' outa that barn o' theirs an' goin' jest where

he pleases. I reckon Jess Wilcox could earn some of his salary by arrestin' that bull, if he was a-mind to.

"Anyway, the bull broke out again this mornin' an' went down to Josh Ponder's. Reckon he was sort of makin' a social call on Josh's ol' cow, Cora, you might say. Little Elmer was out at the barn--an' I was a-drivin' down the road past there.

"The ol' bull jest walked through that rickety gate. Cracked it all to smithereens. Then he sort of strutted around some--the way a feller will when he's a-courtin'--an' ol' Cora flopped a coy ear at 'im an' mooed flirtatiously.

"When the bull started--makin' improper advances, you might say, little Elmer grabbed a hoe an' tried to separate 'em. 'Stop--you stop!' he began yellin'. "'Thou shalt not commit adultery! Thou shalt not commit adultery!'"

"Reckon the poor kid figgered his dad should a-married 'em first--haw-haw!"

III

Jean did not start to school when she was six years old. The new Boonville public school, called the 'Free School', was overcrowded and of negligible quality. And Mary was still afraid of juvenile contamination for Jean.

The child could read well for her age, however, She had made some progress in writing. Mary decided to keep on teaching her. Her own language to the contrary, Mary had had more education than the average woman of her day. And she had trained Jean to speak more grammatical English than either she or Judson used--a feat in itself.

But Judson actually did most of the teaching, although Mary listened to the child's recitations, and imagined that she was doing it. This arrangement, satisfactory to all three, insured that Jean's grounding in the fundamentals was a thorough one.

She loved history and geography especially. Judson bought her collections of American and Carolina history stories, read and talked them over with her. Then he took her to the court house and pointed out the locales of the stories, on his office maps. Jean was especially interested in the big map of their county. It showed Bailey Mountain and Gabriel's Creek and Little Ivy, as well as Boonville. And it was marked off into a lot of odd-shaped chunks, like her jig-saw puzzles. Judson explained that the chunks were townships--that the colored pins sticking in some of them meant the returns from the recent election were not yet in.

"What do they get into, Papa?" she asked.

Judson told her about elections and voting. The county government was there in the courthouse; he took her to the different offices and explained the purpose of each. That, of course, was a natural and logical step to the state and national organizations. Jean could see all of it--right there on the maps.

"Where's Pasquotank, Papa--where's Currituck?" she asked one evening. Judson pointed out the two counties and told her that the expression 'from Pasquotank to Currituck' meant from first to last. But he did not tell her the more loose and profane Tar-Heel idiom, 'From Hell to breakfast'.

"Why did you ask me that, honey?" he questioned.

"Somebody's been chasing ol' Eph Hollywell from there," she told him. "I heard the sheriff say so, Papa."

Somebody, a sheriff or a revenue officer, was always chasing Old Eph. His vocation, avocation, and raison d'être was the making of 'pop-skull', a particularly fiery vintage of moonshine.

Jean had heard a lot about Old Eph. Mary had told her he was a very wicked man, that he plied his evil trade 'somewhere up in them Walnut Mountains'. She also had said that he did it with a mysterious--very, very evil and unlawful--something called a still. Jean believed the name referred to the secretive nature of his work. And she knew that Eph was always having to move his 'still' from place to place--into dark hollows and coves, even into caves!

"There's many a cave back in them mountains, child," Mary had told her. "What goes on in 'em o' nights, the Lord only knows!"

So Jean gradually had come to picture Old Eph in her mind--she had never seen him--as a giant figure, striding over hills and mountains, through hollows and coves, with his 'still' in one hand and a winchester in the other. Sleeping in the caves at night--and building fires.

She had seen one of his fires!

In the back yard one night Judson had pointed to a light near the top of Bailey Mountain. "There's a little cave an' a spring jest this side o' the top, honey," he had said. "Maybe

that light's Ol' Eph Hollywell. I reckon he's jest built 'im a fire an' got his still to goin'. I shouldn't wonder."

Jean had shivered with ecstasy.

The child's first realization of her mother's higher educational training came one evening when Dr. Boone had 'jest drapped in to see if he couldn't find somethin' wrong with somebody'.

"'Dropped'!" Mary sniffed. She and Jean were in the living room, Judson and the doctor on the porch. "That man," she declared, "jest tries to see how many trashy sayin's he can pick up."

Although Mary's barbarisms and colloquialisms were almost as extensive as Dr. Boone's, there were fine distinctions--which he delighted to ignore. Only trash said 'drap'. Jean, however, knew that the doctor was not trash.

Later, when they were all on the porch, he said casually, "I see by the paper, Jud, that Lydia Pinkham female college down at Locust Hill has jest naturally folded its doors an' kicked the bucket. Must a-died o' female troubles--haw-haw!"

Mary was scandalized--by his 'downright vulgarity', and because he was traducing her alma mater. "I'll have you know I went to that school, John Boone!" she asserted. "It was a good school--an' I'll not listen to you a-villigyn' it!"

"Now, Mary," Judson interposed mildly, "Doc didn't mean anything against the school."

"Jud's right; I didn't mean nothin' against it," the doctor assured her. "An I didn't know you'd gone to it either, Mary."

"Well, I did go to it," she stated.

"Yeah, I reckon it was the only kind you could go to then," he said. "But the mixed schools are better. Even Corinth here. It ain't much, I'll admit; but the boys an' gals do git a chance to see each other--at a distance. An' maybe they do a little long-range wife- an'-husband-pickin'."

Mary, however, had opinions of her own about co-education.

"An' I don't believe in their goin' to school together, John Boone," she declared. "They've got no business a-doin' it. Jest you look at John Willard's girl--as moral an' up-standin' a girl as ever lived, before she left here. An' look what happened to her down at that University--that Jud went to. Though they didn't let girls in then. Which was jest as well, the Lord knows--"

She paused for breath, went on: "Do you want to know what happened to her? Well, I'll tell you, John Boone--you a-talkin' to me about gals goin' to the same schools with men, when they ain't no better than they are, an' never will be! Yes, I'll tell you--she played out, that's what she done!"

The doctor murmured: "You don't say, Mary!"

"Yes, she did!" Mary cried. "An' many another's done it--an' they'll do it again. An' more of 'em will do it. Yes, you jest mark my words, John Boone--they'll do it again!"

"I reckon they will, Mary," he chuckled. "I jest reckon they will."

Her mother's vehemence frightened Jean. But she had not failed to notice Mary's climax--that somebody had 'played out'. The expression, she felt, must have a tremendous significance.

She resolved to ask Judson about it. He, however, had joined the discussion.

"You don't see things like that happenin' very often though, Mary," he said. "They don't happen down at Corinth. An' what's the harm in young folks meetin' in school an' gettin' acquainted? I don't see any."

"I didn't say there's any harm in that, Jud Taylor," Mary denied. "But how do you know they don't do more--than jest meet? That good-for-nothin' college down there," she said contemptuously. "You needn't be holdin' it up for any shinin' light, I reckon. I've heard things about it--I ain't a-sayin' what they are, but I've heard 'em. An' if I was a-mind to tell you what I've heard about the goin's-on down there--it 'ould make you blush with shame!"

"Dang my rotten ol' duodenum--let's hear 'em!" the doctor chortled.

"You'll not hear 'em from me," Mary stated. "But--what I know, I know."

IV

One day, rummaging in the attic, Jean came across an old violin. It was Judson's, the one he had taken West with him years before; but the child did not know that. She ran down stairs with the instrument.

"Here, Papa," she cried, "play something on it!"

Judson took the old fiddle, looked at it wistfully. Although he had laid it aside long ago because of Mary's chiding, he had loved to play it. Now his fingers trembled as they felt its familiar neck and fingerboard.

"Play something," Jean begged. But one string was gone; another snapped as he adjusted the bridge.

"I'll have to fix it up, honey," he told Jean.

Next day he had Doc Wigginhorn, the druggist, order strings and horsehair for the bow. When they came a few days later, Jean watched him glue the horsehair into the frog and tip of the bow, trim and fit a new bridge, and finally restring the old fiddle. But the playing had to be postponed until the glue had set.

"Never mind, honey," he told her. "Maybe it'll be all right tomorrow evenin'. We'll see."

"I should think a man your age 'ould have better sense than to be a-foolin' around with a fiddle, Jud Taylor," Mary said tartly. "No good ever come of it, an' none never will."

"Oh, I might as well tune it up for the child. She wants to hear her daddy play, I reckon," he said quietly.

Mary knew that she could dictate to Judson most of the time--but not all the time. This, she realized, was one of the times she couldn't. Nevertheless, she remained an actively dissenting minority.

To her a fiddle was 'profane music' symbolized--an instrument of the Devil. Because of its association with dancing she felt the same kind of aversion to a fiddle that she felt for a deck of cards or a bottle of whiskey. Hence, she was sure that Judson's playing the instrument was a menace to Jean's eternal salvation. It was but a step from 'fiddlin'' to 'dancin''; and that to Mary--and to most people in Boonville--included at least six of the seven deadly sins. But Judson

had made up his mind to play--and he would play.

When he arrived from work the following afternoon, Jean ran to meet him carrying the fiddle and bow. "Here, Papa-- look at it!" she exclaimed.

He sat down under the walnut tree and examined the bow. "Looks like it's set," he said. He tuned the instrument, stretching and pinching the strings with--to Jean--agonizing deliberation. Then he said: "Run an' get me that rosin, Honey. It's in a little red box on my desk."

When she returned with it, there was more delay. He scrape the rosin with his knife, then rubbed the horsehair through the powder--slowly and carefully. Finally he drew the bow across the strings, and the old fiddle gave out a tremulous double-stop wail. To Jean it was the most magically beautiful sound she had ever heard.

"Play something!" she breathed.

Somewhat uncertainly, because of his stiff fingers and wrist, Judson played 'Believe me if all those Endearing Young Charms'. The child was almost hysterical in her delight. She urged him to play more--until Mary came and stood on the steps.

"Let's see--'Cumberlan' Gap'. How does that go, Mary?" he asked.

Mary sniffed. "Do you want this whole town to think you've gone crazy, Jud Taylor?" she asked. "If you have to play--you can do it in the house, I reckon."

That was her way of saying she had decided to tolerate his playing, even though she would not sanction it.

After supper he played again for the child. And thereafter, for several years, he did so almost every night.

Judson usually had something to tell about each tune. This one he had learned from Ol' Liff Roberts, who had got it in Nashville during the War; Andy Phillips, the Shelton Laurel fiddler, played 'Sourwood Mountain' this way....But the correct tune was this way....And here was an old song they used to sing when they rolled their tobacco hogsheads to Lynchburg, Virginia:

"I'm a-goin' down

To Lynchburg town,

To sell my 'bacco there."

There was 'Boatman's Dance', which Brother Sam had learned from a fiddling Yankee prisoner; and there was 'Devil's Dream'--in the key of A; and 'Cumberland Gap'--"That's where Daniel Boone crossed the mountains, honey."

Then there were "Rochester Schottische", "Kentucky Breakdown", "Mississippi Sawyer", "Leather Breeches", "Sally Ann", "The Ol' Hen She Cackles", "Blue-eyed Girl"--hundreds of them, in fact. For his repertoire had been a long one, and he seemed to be able to recall every tune he had ever heard. A few years later Jean was to identify his "Kiss Waltz"--which he had 'picked up somewhere, he couldn't remember jest where'--as "Il Baccio".

Judson liked waltzes and slow tunes best. "I never was much good at breakdown music," he confessed. That, she learned, was the very fast jigs and reels played for 'square' dances.

"This is a breakdown, honey," he told her, playing a few bars of the tune. "It's called 'Roarin' Branch'. Some call it

'June Bug a-settin' on a Sweet 'Tater Vine'. It's kinda like 'Soldier's Joy'--an' that's got another name too.

'Buffalo Gals' is another breakdown; an' I used to know a feller over in Tennessee who called that 'Johnson Boys'. But 'Johnson Boys' goes this way...."

"Chicken in the Bread Tray" was another breakdown, Jean learned. That, too, had words:

"Chicken in the bread tray,
Pickin' up the dough--
Granny, will your dog bite?
No, child--no!"

Then there were Stephen Foster's songs, all of which Jean loved. But "Beautiful Dreamer"--which Judson played with double stops--best of all. One evening after he had played that, the child turned to Mary: "Wasn't it beautiful, mamma?" she almost begged.

"Yes, it was," Mary stated gruffly. Then, in self-defense, she added: "I reckon Jud Taylor could play decent music all the time--if he had a-mind to."

Mary had an old 'square' piano in the little parlor off the living room, but the instrument was never unlocked, except for prayer meetings. When Mary's turn came for the weekly, house-to-house meetings, she usually played accompaniments to the hymns; but Jean had not been impressed by her mother's performances--nor with the piano as a musical instrument. It had never occurred to the child that a piano and a violin might be played together.

One evening Judson unlocked the piano and showed Jean the chords in C Major--the tonic, with the dominant and sub-dominant

changes. Then, using a simple bass, he hummed and 'beat time' to "Little Brown Jug".

"Learn to do that, honey," he told her, "an' you can play with me when I fiddle."

Jean was delighted with the prospect. In less than a month she could chord to simple tunes, and Judson began to play with her.

Mary came into the parlor one evening while they were playing. "Ain't it about time you started teachin' that child some scales an' note-readin'?" she asked grimly.

"You'd better show 'er the scales," Judson said. "I don't understand the fingerin', Mary."

She sat down beside Jean and showed her how to finger the C scale. "Now--see that you practice it," she said--and returned to her knitting.

~~But--that~~ "is it, papa?" the child whispered.

Judson explained that the notes of a melody come from the key scale or scales in which it is played, as do the chords, or harmony.

"I reckon you'd better come an' show the child," he called to Mary. "She wants to hear how a piece goes on the piano."

"I'll do no such thing," Mary retorted. "I can't play nothin' without music, Jud Taylor--an' you know it."

But when Jean ran to the book-case for a collection of hymns, Mary got up and went back to the piano. "I'll play this," she said gruffly. She pounded out "Come, All Ye Faithful".

"Do you see how she does it, honey?" Judson asked the child. "The top note--here--is the melody, and the rest make

up the chords to it."

"An' when you're in practice--which I ain't," Mary said, "you can hit the melody notes a little harder an' make 'em stand out."

She demonstrated with "When the Roll is Called up Yonder."

Jean was interested. "My goodness, you play well, mamma!" she exclaimed. "You make it say the basses, an' everything."

"I jest play them notes," Mary stated. "An' that's what you ought to be a-doin'."

Jean, of course, wanted to learn about the notes; but Mary's patience was soon exhausted, and she left the music-reading to Judson. He had Doc Wigginhorn order some piano-instruction books from Asheville. When they came, Jean boasted primly to Dr. Boone that she was 'taking music lessons from Mamma'.

CHAPTER III

I

On Gabriel's Creek a few miles above Boonville Judson owned a little farm, which he rented to various tenants, from one time to another. As the rent was always paid in corn, wheat, and other farm produce, he took his grain to Samp McHurdie's mill to have it ground. McHurdie ran a small flour mill on lower Gabriel's Creek, and a little 'hopper' which ground corn.

Jean learned that 'Samp' was short for 'Samson'--and thought the name very applicable. McHurdie was a big jolly fellow, given to shouting instead of talking, because for years he had had to pitch his voice above the rattles and clatters of the mill and the rumbling and splashing of the big water-wheel that ran it.

As soon as Judson considered her old enough, he started taking Jean to mill with him; and one day McHurdie led her around behind the mill and showed her a litter of pups that had just opened their eyes. Their mother, a well-marked collie, stood proudly wagging her tail beside them.

"Pick yourself out one, sweetheart," the miller grinned.

Thrilled almost to tears, Jean did so; and later, at Judson's suggestion, named the pup 'Ted', in honor of Theodore Roosevelt--whom Judson admired in spite of the fact that the 'trust buster' was a Republican. Because of the pup, and because McHurdie always grinned at her and called her 'sweetheart' when he saw her, Jean came to like the big miller.

Judson went to mill every week or so. He had no regular day, but he tried to avoid Saturdays. And because he did not leave his office until after five o'clock, the return trip was usually made after dark. With 'Ol' Bunk' hitched to the buggy, and with two sacks of wheat and one of corn piled behind the seat, Jean and Judson would set out for the mill in a spirit of high adventure. 'Goin' to mill' became one of their chief pleasures.

The road itself was a seemingly limitless source of interest to Jean. At first it ran prosaically along the edge of rich bottoms planted with wheat, corn, and tobacco; then it climbed red-clay hills almost bare of vegetation and corrugated with gullies--or others, grassed and rail-fences for pasture. From the highest one of these it slipped down into a series of hollows, each one of which sheltered a log tobacco barn or a group of long, canvas-covered tobacco beds. In these the seeds

were germinated, Jean learned, and grew there until ready for transplanting in the fields. Finally the road crossed more bottom lands and came to Gabriel's Creek again--after already having crossed it five times. Jean always counted the crossings.

But this time the road did not cross the creek. And instead of turning down stream, as they had been going, they turned up it! Jean was greatly mystified about that, until Judson reminded her of the last big hill they had crossed. The road crossed the hill--and the creek ran around it. Because the road met the stream half a mile below the mill, they had to go up the creek to get there!

Jean felt that the arrangement was extremely complicated. It would have been so much easier and shorter, she thought, to have kept on down the creek in the first place.

But even then the caprices of the road did not cease. After it turned up the creek, it made a sharp bend to the left, went around three sides of a square field--when it could have kept straight ahead--and crossed the creek again. Then, just as the road was about to run smack into a log shack with a little Negro playing in the doorway, it crossed the stream again, followed it up--until the little negro was safe--and crossed it again!

"Aren't we ever going to get there, Papa?" Jean wanted to know. But they were there. The old mill was audible; it soon became visible.

The log building was moss-grown, with a stone foundation. On one side of it roated the enormous wheel, likewise moss-grown

Jean

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and water-soaked--fed by the long mill-race which wound around the hillside and disappeared in the woods. Inside the building a complicated arrangement of belts and pulleys conveyed the wheel's power to the grinding machinery. But the flour-covered hoppers, chutes, and elevators interested her most. They made her think of the frosting on one of her mother's cakes.

Across the creek from the mill there was a general store and post office; above the ford leading to it was a foot-log for pedestrians. Jean liked to stand on the log and watch the fish wavering lazily in the pool below.

Judson told her that they were just mullet, that all the trout had disappeared from Gabriel's Creek years ago. But to the child they were shadowy, phantom-like, mysterious--eerily suggestive of an entire world of creatures that might live in the water....

Closing her eyes, she could almost see some of them, peering at her from the big mossy rocks across the pool, in the shadows of the willows....At night, she thought, maybe they came out of the water and climbed the big water-wheel and rode its dripping rim around and around--as she would like to do....

Somewhere along the road to the mill Judson always remembered to give her a nickel; and after she had watched McHurdie unload the grain, dip his toll-dish into each sack and 'strike' it level with a ruler, she would cross the footlog to the store.

"May I have five cents worth of stick candy, please, Mr. Pinner?" she would say primly. Kling Pinner, the storekeeper, sold only one kind; he considered soft candies effeminate.

Selecting her favorite size and color, Jean would ask for an extra paper bag--for the stick she always carried home to Mary.

Then she would return to the mill and offer some of her candy to Judson and McHurdie. The miller would grin at her and shout: "No, thank ye, sweetheart. I gotta chaw o' terbaccer." And Judson would murmur: "You eat it, honey."

As the flour sifted from the chute into Judson's sacks, McHurdie would roll it between his thumb and finger. Presently he would say: "That's mighty fine-millin' grain you got there, Mr. Taylor."

And Judson would say: "Yes, it is, Samp. I got the seed from my Brother Sam--it come from Montana."

II

Saturday afternoons at the mill were social as well as business occasions. The farmers met there to trade horses, pitch horseshoes, talk politics--or discuss the latest 'shootin' scrape' on Shelton Laurel. Voters' registration lists were posted on the big sycamore in front of the mill; and during election years candidates came on Saturday afternoons to drum up votes. From the mill steps they would lift their voices above its clatter in impassioned exhortations and denunciations. And usually a few of the voters 'got high' at the candidates' expense. There were frequent fights on such occasions; sometimes there was a 'shootin'' or a 'cuttin''.

The farmers usually 'jest hitched up an' brought the family'. Wagons and other vehicles would line the road on both sides of the creek. Children would be running everywhere, yelling and shrieking; men and women would be shouting to--and

at--each other; horses would stamp and nicker and whinney; now and then a mule or a donkey would bray.

But presently this maelstrom of noise and motion would assume a pattern; the men would congregate in front of the mill; and the women and 'young-'uns' would gather in front of the store, to exchange the latest news--such as how 'that low-down, good-for-nothin' Tootsie Tucker had done gone an' played out at last; an' they said its daddy was Simp Burns'.

Kling Pinner, who ran the store, was also a barber, justice-of-the-peace, an 'oculist', and a 'jeweler'--meaning that he sold spectacles and put crystals on watches. He also pulled teeth, doctored sick cows and horses--and when asked to would write an indignant letter to a United States senator.

Kling also sold flour--from the big mill at Marshall. This, he insisted, was better than that made by McHurdie; and he asked a higher price for it. But the customers did not see it that way. Why should they exchange their grain for Kling's measly little sacks of flour--which was no better than McHurdie's anyway--when they could take the grain across the creek and get 'an honest millin'?

Because of the competition, Pinner and McHurdie were 'at outs'. Samp went to the post office for his mail, but he got his groceries in Boonville; and Kling would cross the foot-log to a political speaking--but not to pitch horseshoes. And the rival games he tried to start on his side of the creek always petered out. Kling became vindictive, but the miller considered the situation a huge joke--on Kling.

But in Boonville and throughout the county generally it was understood that something besides flour and groceries

was being sold at the mill. Reverend Ponder had preached a sermon about it, asserting that the Christians of Boonville should "rise in their might an' stomp this demon from their very door-step--where it was lappin' at the pure an' innocent feet of helpless women an' little children!"

The preacher had gone to the sheriff about it, and that official had sent a deputy to the mill to investigate. The deputy had spent a pleasant afternoon pitching horseshoes--had even enjoyed a drink or two--but he had seen nothing to get excited about. A few farmers were a little 'high'; they staggered around, made some noise--but what did that dam' preacher expect?

A few days after Jean's eighth birthday, June second, Judson was called to Asheville on county business and did not return until Friday. "It's a good thing you got back tonight, Jud Taylor," Mary told him. "I'm out o' flour."

"Well, I'll have to go tomorrow after dinner," he grumbled. "An' it's Saturday, too."

Ordinarily Jean would not have gone with him on Saturday; but she begged so hard to go he decided to trade his wheat for flour, rather than wait for it to be ground. By starting immediately after noon he hoped to avoid the Saturday crowd. But a tire came off a buggy wheel on the way, and Judson had to talk half a mile for an axe before he could wedge it back on. When they got to the mill, the road already was lined with buggies and wagons.

As he drove up to the steps for Samp to unload his grain, Judson was greeted with "Howdy, Jud", "'Evenin', Judson", and,

by the younger men and boys, "Good Evenin', Mrs. Taylor". But he noticed an unwonted tenseness in the salutations--as though everyone was waiting for something to happen.

"I'll jest trade mine today, Samp," he told the miller. "I'm in a hurry."

McHurdie had swung two of the sacks onto the steps, as easily as Jean could have swung pillows. He looked at Judson for a moment, rubbed his hands on his trousers.

"I jest kain't give you any, Mr. Taylor," he shouted grimly. "Some dirty, low-down, sneakin', son-of-a-bitchin' thief busted into the mill last night--stole every dam' dust o' flour I had! An' I reckon I've got one idee where it is--jest one!" he added. "It's over there in the back o' that store--sewed up in a passel o' them Marshall mill sacks!"

"I wouldn't say that, Samp," Judson admonished. "Not unless I had mighty good proof, I wouldn't."

"I don't need no proof," McHurdie shouted. "Kling Pinner's nothin' but a dirty, low-down, sneakin', son-of-a-bitchin' thief!"

As Judson got out of the buggy, Jean clutched at his arm; but he murmured, "I'll be right back, honey", and put his hand on the miller's shoulder.

"Don't be a-sayin' it though, Samp," he begged. "There's a right an' a wrong way to do things. An' if you find out Kling didn't do it, you'll be mighty sorry you accused him."

But Samp had been accusing Pinner all day--and Kling had been hearing him. Each time he had heard McHurdie's bellow across the creek, he had gone to the shed behind the store and

had taken a drink of whiskey. For Kling was afraid of Samp-- in almost mortal terror of him.

And to make matters worse, Kling's cronies had been hearing the shouts too, had been telling him he ought to do something about them. "You hadn't ort to take things like that, Kling," one of them had said. "Not from that dirty nigger, anyway

For it was whispered around the community--very softly, lest Samp should hear of the whispers--that he had Negro blood in his veins. But the miller was a 'white man' anyway, almost every one admitted. And for all anybody actually knew, he was 'jest a black-headed Scotch-Irisher', as he claimed to be.

But Pinner, already fear- and liquor-crazed to the point of hysteria, and further goaded by the word 'nigger', had heard Samp's supreme insult--'son-of-a-bitchin' thief'. Snatching a Winchester carbine from behind a show-case, he staggered down to his end of the foot-log, followed by his henchmen.

"Jest come over here--you dam' dirty nigger!" he screamed. "Jest set one foot past the center O' that log--an' I'll show you who's a thief! I'll shoot your God dam' dirty black heart out!"

"Don't, Samp! Don't pay any 'tention to 'im!" Judson cried

But McHurdie pushed him to one side, started toward the bridge. Others tried to stop him, but he shrugged them off--flailed them aside with his arms without noticing them. He reached the foot-log.

Judson had staggered back--had snatched the now terrified Jean from the buggy. With her in his arms, he ran toward the creek.

"Don't shoot, Kling--run!" he shouted. "Run--he'll kill you!"

But Pinner did not run. When McHurdie reached the middle of the foot-log he yelled: "Stop--don't you tech me! I'll kill y

Sampt kept on across the log--his eyes on Kling, his head thrust forward, his hands clinched.

Pinner shrieked: "Stop--I tell ye!" Then he fired.

But Samp did not stop--and Kling fired twice more. Then the miller reached him--landed a terrific blow which hurled Pinner back among the wagons. His head struck an iron-rimmed hub with a sickening, cracking thud. Kling slumped to the ground, his legs thrashing.

When he realized that Pinner was going to shoot, Judson had thrust the terrified Jean behind a tree. Crouching with her face hidden, she did not see the blow. But Judson did; he watched McHurdie stagger to the prostrate store-keeper--stop, put a hand to his forehead and look around dazedly. Then Samp started swaying.

"He's shot--bad!" Judson shouted. "Somebody go after Doc Boone!"

Samp fell to his hands and knees, rolled over on his side--his legs doubled, his hands clutching the grass. Jean saw him that way--and fainted.

More terrified by her blood-drained face than he had been by the shooting, Judson staggered with her to the creek bed and stretched her on the sand--splashed water on her face and rubbed her wrists.

Jean opened her eyes. "Papa--take me home!" she whispered.

In the buggy, she clung to him, sobbing hysterically as Ol' Bunk clattered toward Boonville. A man shouted to him: "No need to send Doc Boone, Jud--they're both dead!"

The sack of corn was still in the buggy....

III

When they reached home, Jean was hot and delirious.

"Put 'er to bed," he told Mary. "I'll go after Doc Boone."

Mary felt the child's pulse a moment. "Yes," she said; "an' hurry, Jud Taylor!"

The doctor was eating his supper. "The child's sick, Doc," Judson said. Dr. Boone said: "I'll git my grip."

On the way up the street Judson told him what had happened "Nervous shock--hysteria," the doctor muttered. "Pore little thing--"

But his manner changed at Jean's bedside. "Well, Well--is this the little gal that don't never git sick, Mary?" he murmured. "Jud says she's tryin' to run a mite o' temperature. Maybe we'd better give 'er a chance to see what a thermometer tastes like. Reckon you could open your mouth, honey?"

Jean whispered a "Yes, sir", and he slipped the tube between her lips. "Ain't supposed to bite it, you know", he droned. "Them thermometers is mighty hard on the digestion, they say--never tried one myself. Does it tickle your tongue, honey? Whoa there--you ain't supposed to say nothin'. Jest bob your head--oh, it does tickle! Well, we'll jest take it right out."

He read the thermometer. "Danged if she don't have a mite--jest a mite--o' fever, Jud," he said. "Want me to give you some nasty, bitter ol' medicine for it, honey?"

Jean managed a faint "No, sir".

"Now, ain't that strange!" he chuckled. "Most gals your age jest dote on medicine. But--we'll jest give you this little white pill then. Don't taste a-tall. An' your ma's a-goin' to bring you a glass o'water, so you can swallow it whole--an' you won't have to chew it."

Mary had anticipated the water; Jean got the pill down with a grimace. Then he waved Judson and Mary from the room--began to drone a monologue to the child: "Funny critters, mules, honey--ever notice 'em? Got two long ears an' one short tail--an' no gumption whatever. Stubborn--lazy--mighty finicky about their eatin', too. Got to be mighty respectful o' their heels--all the time. Jest can't trust a mule...."

When she was asleep, he joined Judson and Mary in the kitchen. "How is she?" they asked together.

"She'll sleep for a while, I reckon," he told them. "But she's had a bad shock--her mind'll fight sleep. Jud, you go an' git Hammer Bill's Lindy--"

"I'll set with 'er," Mary stated. "I'll not close my eyes this night, John Boone--an' you know it."

Dr. Boone did not argue. "But you won't set with 'er, nor Jud either," he told Mary. "She'll wake up--an' the way you two look, you'd scare 'er to death. Lindy can talk to 'er. Jud, you go git Lindy."

At a sick bed the doctor's word was law. Mary did not reply, and Judson went to get the Negro woman. She and her husband, Hammer Bill Johnson, lived with their numerous progeny at the foot of the hill behind Judson's barn. Hurrying down

through the pasture, he found Lindy in the act of giving her three-year-old, 'Marvel', his after-supper spanking before putting him to bed. Hammer Bill lay on his back in the yard, snoring in several keys; and from the boarded lean-to which served as a kitchen to the cabin, a clattering and bickering announced that the older children were washing the supper dishes.

At the sound of Judson's step on the porch Lindy gave little Marvel a shake--to quiet him--and came to the door. "'Evenin', Mistah Taylah," she beamed. "Come right in. William, you jest wake up--here's Mistah Taylah. William! Wake yo'self up--right this minute!"

Judson said: "I want you, Lindy. Our little girl is sick. Can you come up an' set with her tonight?"

"Lawdy, yes--po' little thing!" she exclaimed. Snatching a clean apron, she followed Judson up the hill.

"The child's still sleepin'," Dr. Boone told her. "But she saw that killin' down at the mill, Lindy. You set with 'er, an' when she wakes up, keep 'er from thinkin' about it. You know how to do it, I reckon."

"Yessah--po' little thing! I knows jest what to do," she assured him.

But when he saw Lindy sit down beside Jean's bed and promptly go to sleep herself, Judson wondered. "Are you sure she knows what to do, Doc?" he asked anxiously. All three had gone back to the kitchen.

"She does," the doctor stated. "Must be instinct--for she hasn't a brain in 'er head. But--you jest wait an' listen to 'er."

"Is she--is it serious, Doc?" Judson questioned.

"No, I reckon it ain't--I reckon it ain't," Dr. Boone said thoughtfully. "But it could a-been....if I hadn't never met that Nigger wench in there. Funny thing, Jud--I'm jest settin' at Lindy's feet an' learnin'...which most doctors ain't got the brains to do...."

Mary, with his reassurance, became practical. "Well--you two jest set yourselves down an' eat some supper," she ordered. "If you say the child'll be all right, John Boone, I reckon she will."

Jean awoke around one o'clock--weeping hysterically. Judson and Mary were on their feet at the first sound from the bedroom. "Wait!" the doctor said sharply. "Let Lindy handle 'er!"

They could hear the Negress's voice, low and soothing--a soporific: "It's all right, honey--it's jest me, Lindy. Yo' ma, she thinks maybe you're a-ketchin' a little cold--so she jest asked me to come an' set with you--so you wouldn't git uncovered. You keep right quiet, honey, an' go back to sleep--"

"Where's Ma--where's Papa?" Jean cried.

"They're jest a-settin' in the kitchen, talkin' to Doctah Boone," Lindy soothed her. "But you're all right, an' the doctah's a-goin' on home--"

"Papa!" Jean called.

Judson answered, his voice strained and husky: "Yes, honey, we're right here."

"Papa!" she cried, "why did the Lord let him kill Samp? Why did He?"

Dr. Boone hissed: "Let Lindy talk to 'er!"

"Don' you worry none about Samp, honey," Lindy was saying. "The Lawd's lookin' out fo' him, sho' 'nuf. He's done got Samp right under His wing--right this minute! He jest wanted to take Samp--an' He did. Samp's a-sittin' right up there with the angels.

"He can see you, honey--he knows you're a-worryin'--an' he's a-smilin' down at you an' tellin' you not to. Dat Samp man, he jest wouldn't trade places with nobody, honey....

"Cain't you jest see 'im up there?" she went on. "A-smilin' an' grinnin'--the way he always does? Don't he look happy? An' would he--lessen he was? Close yo' eyes, honey--an' see if you cain't jest see 'im...."

A few minutes later she tiptoes to the door: "She's asleep now, po' little thing..."

IV

When Dr. Boone 'jest dropped up to see how that cold was comin' along' next day, Jean was helping her mother in the kitchen. "My cold's all gone, Dr. Boone," Jean said. "An' we're going to Burnsville tomorrow--to see Aunt Phronie an' Uncle Alex an' Little Alex, an' everybody!"

The doctor manifested tremendous surprise: "Well, well--Jud Taylor a-goin' traipsin' around the country, leavin' this county to go to wrack an' ruin! But it'll do 'im good, honey. Yes, sir, it'll do 'im good. An' it's jest about time he took hisself a vacation, too."

"Why can't you come along with us, Doc?" Judson asked. "You could git that Weaverville feller to look after your practice, I reckon."

"Not him--he's down at Raleigh again, tryin' to convince the state board he ain't a menace to life, liberty, an' the pursuit o' happiness," the doctor chuckled. "But I might git that young whiffle-breeches down at Marshall. We'll jest see."

When Lindy came again after supper--her third trip up the hill that day--Judson hinted tactfully that he'd like to give her something for helping with Jean. Lindy laughed and shook her head.

"No, sah, Mistah Taylah," she said. "I've been a-doin' the washin' fo' you-all ever since that good-fo'-nothin' Hagar Galloway went an' took up with that white-trash--an' him married, too!--an' you-all's been a-payin' me good. I jest couldn't take no money for settin' up with that po' little lamb. I'd be plumb ashamed to."

Judson thanked her. "It's mighty good of you, Lindy," he said. "Yes--it's mighty good of you."

"Yes, it is, Lindy Johnson," Mary stated. "An' you can be mighty sure we ain't a-goin' to forget it."

Dr. Boone had contacted the 'young whiffle-breeches' by telephone, had arranged to go with them to Burnsville. They started early the following morning, Jean and the doctor in his buggy, Judson and Mary in the other. Burnsville was a day's drive from Boonville, over rough mountain roads. The dog Ted rode with Jean and Dr. Boone. She had wanted to bring Spot, the cat, as well; but Mary had vetoed that. "Cats don't go a-gaddin' around over the country," she had said. "Lindy'll feed it, when she comes up to look after the cow an' chickens."

They drove out across Cussin' Knob, past Peter Mountain to Little Ivy Creek, which they crossed and followed up to

Middle Fork. There Judson and Dr. Boone stopped in the ford to water the horses.

Jean leaned out of the buggy and trailed her fingers in the stream. It was cold and clear; it 'talked' over the rocks, in rapid, playful swirls. But Ol' Prince and Ol' Bunk were not yet thirsty. They muzzled the surface of the stream tentatively, opened their mouths and--as it seemed to Jean--sneered at it, smelled it again and snorted derisively.

Presently, as they topped the first big hill beyond Middle Fork, Mary called from the other buggy: "There's the sun--it's jest comin' up."

She pointed to the Blue Ridge, a long mist-covered panorama forming the eastern horizon. The rim of the sun was just beginning to edge above the sway-backs of the mountains. Jean watched it come up--scatter the mist which hung over the broad sweep of valleys, hills, and mountains.

"Where's the Black Mountains, Doctor?" she questioned. "Where's the Bald--an' Mount Mitchell an' Craggy?"

Dr. Boone chuckled, pulled Ol' Prince to a stop. "Didn't forgit a few, did you, honey?" he grinned.

Then he pointed out the mountains: "Them's the Blacks, honey. Mitchell's over there behind 'em, but you can't see it--too far away. An' Craggy's over there too--somewhere. Maybe it's one o' them peaks that are beginnin' to stick up through the mist. Pisgah--that's 'way over there beyond Asheville.

"An' you'll be able to see ol' Bald Mountain when we git across the divide into the Bald Creek an' Cane River country," he told her. "Clingman's Dome--that's away over there some--

where. Maybe Jud can show it to you when we git up on the divide."

They were climbing that now. The sun began to beat down upon them, and the mountains loomed up in front of them--bigger, more distinct. Their wooded slopes were dark green in the sunshine, almost black in the hollows. When Jean turned to look back, she saw that the more distant valleys and hills now were beginning to look blue.

"All these mountains look blue at a distance," the doctor told her. "That's why they call them--over there--the Blue Ridge; an' them--in the west--the Great Smokies. Look at the Black Mountains now, honey--you can hardly see 'em. In a clear atmosphere, they'd show up twice as far."

"What makes the air so blue?"

"It ain't the air," he chuckled. "Jest somethin' in it, I reckon--maybe water-vapor. But I jest couldn't say as to that."

Presently they came to another ford; and the horses, now hot and panting, no longer disdained the water. Planting their front feet apart, they stretched their necks and plunged their muzzles into its refreshing coolness. Judson pulled ol' Bunk's head up.

"They're pretty warm now," he said. "Reckon we'd better not let 'em drink too much, Doc."

"An' we'd better let 'em blow a spell too," the doctor agreed.

Jean and the dog scrambled out of the buggy, and the others got out more leisurely. Judson pointed to a tree with reddish-brown bark and dense green foliage. "That's a balsam, 'Genie," he told her. "It's got blisters all over the bark--

full o' balsam."

Dr. Boone took a small bottle from his medicine case and opened his pocket knife. "Stick the p'int o' that into the bottom o' them blisters an' hold the bottle to 'em," he directed Jean. "You might git a few drops--I shouldn't wonder."

She returned with a teaspoonful. "What's it for?" she wanted to know.

"One o' the oldest remedies known to man," the doctor said. "An ol' feller named Paracelsus used to claim it kept people healthy--thought it contained what he called the 'life principle'. But it's been used ever since Bible times for healin' cuts an' wounds, I reckon.

"Mighty interestin' tree," he added to Judson. "The right name for it is Fraser fir; an' that species ain't found anywhere except in these Appalachians."

Later he showed Jean a number of plants growing on the open mountain side. "Them's butterfly weeds," he said; "though some call 'em pleurisy-root. Them long leaves are called 'lancelate'--because they look like a knife blade. An' them purty orange-yaller flowers are called 'short-peduncled'--because they have short stems on 'em."

Jean found it all very interesting--as the doctor meant for her to. A few miles later she pointed to an old cow standing forlornly in a fence corner beside the road. The 'slings and arrows of outrageous fortune' had deprived the animal of more than half her tail. "Look, Doctor!" the child cried. "Look at her--she's 'short-pedunkled'!"

Dr. Boone haw-hawed.

After eating their lunch on top of the divide--fried chicken and a watermelon included in the lunch--they descended it by a steep winding road, came presently to cultivated fields again. They were like patches pasted on the mountain side, Jean thought. Their tillers lived in log cabins or shacks, seemingly stuck into the steep slopes, or tucked down in the hollows beside a little 'branch'---which dashed along at a great rate, as though anxious to become a creek. It had done so before they reached the foot of the mountain.

Down in the Cane River country Jean got her first view of Bald Mountain--but the top was hidden in clouds. She forgot her disappointment however when Mary called for her to look at a tree beside the road. It was wild holly, the first Jean had ever seen. The fat little cedars, she also learned, were junipers. She laughed at that, because Hammer Bill and Lindy's youngest girl was named 'Juniper'."

They reached Burnsville before dark.

"Land sakes--light an' come in!" Phronie greeted them. "You're jest in time for supper!"

Dr. Boone had planned to stay with his old friend Dr. Gillespie; but Alex MacLean, Phronie's husband, would not listen to such an arrangement. "Come in--come in! An' take off your coats," he said heartily. "Phronie--is any o' that cider left?"

There was, a big pitcher of it. While they were drinking it, Alex asked: "Did you bring that fiddle, Jud?"

Judson had brought it. Considerably to his surprise, Mary had suggested that he do so. "It'll help keep that child's mind off of things," she had said. "An' Alex'll be askin'.

about your fiddlin' anyhow."

Judson promised to play after supper. Jean, standing beside his chair, whispered: "They've got an organ, Papa--I can play with you."

He smiled and patted her hand.

The older MacLean children appeared at supper. There were four besides Little Alex, the youngest. Trixie was seventeen--and 'nigh onto bein' an ol' maid', her father chuckled; Johnny was sixteen; and the twins, Dolly and Polly, were twelve. To them of course Jean and Little Alex--both just past eight--were merely 'young-'uns'.

At the table Jean folded her hands and waited primly. Little Alex however shouted: "I want some honey, Ma!"

Johnny snickered and the twins giggled. Trixie grimaced and sighed. "Well, what are we waitin' for--free silver?" Alex asked.

"You've forgot somethin', Alex," Phronie reminded him. Trixie whispered: "The blessin', Pa!"

But Alex was in no wise flustered. With a whimsical glance at Judson and the doctor, he replaced his napkin on the table: "Will you ask God's blessin' on what's set before us, Jud?"

All bowed their heads--except Little Alex, who merely ducked his and continued to look around through his laced finers. "O Lord, we thank Thee for this food," Judson said. "Bless it to our bodies--an' forgive us our sins. We ask it for Christ's sake. Amen."

Little Alex yelled: "Ma--oh, Ma! Ain't you never a-goin' "

to give me no honey?"

CHAPTER IV

I

After supper the men went to the barn to look after the horses and 'cow-critters'; and Trixie, with considerable condescension, offered to do the dishes. Jean offered to dry them. This arrangement gave Phronie and Mary an opportunity to discuss the double-killing--which they did on the porch. The twins and Little Alex had discovered that Jean's dog Ted would chase a thrown stick; they were amusing themselves with him in the front yard.

Little Alex' hound, Ol' Mose, sat on the steps and watched the proceedings mournfully, thumping his tail occasionally to indicate vague approval, even though he lacked the energy to participate. Presently Jean called from the kitchen door: "Here, Ted--come here, Ted!"

The dog was away in an instant, and the twins and Little Alex were highly indignant. "Ma, oh, Ma!" Dolly cried; "She's took 'er dog away from us!"

"An' we wasn't doin' nothin' but playin' with 'im!" Dolly declared.

"Shame on you--big girls like you!" Phronie scolded them. "She was jest callin' that dog to feed it. An' you, Little Alex--go right this minute an' feed that good-for-nothin' houn', like I've told you to!"

Mose followed him and the twins toward the kitchie, in a slow-motion Australian crawl, his ears flapping, his tail

forming a perfect Spencerian pot-hook. They found Jean feeding Ted.

"Whatter you a-doin', 'Genie?' Little Alex questioned-- although her occupation was obvious.

"I'm feedin' him," she said. "Aren't you going to feed Mose, Little Alex?"

"Shucks--no!" he scoffed. "That ol' houn' don't need no feedin'. When he gits hungry, he jest goes an' ketches hisself a rabbit."

"Ma told you to feed that houn'--every single day!" Polly accused.

"An' if you don't," Dolly seconded, "we're a-goin' to tell Ma!"

Mose had joined the circle around Ted, had sat down-- 'jest to rest his hind-quarters'. Upon his face was a look of infinite sadness and yearning. Jean patted his head.

"Poor Mose," she murmured. "He does look hungry, Little Alex."

"Well, jest let 'im look--if he wants to," the boy retorted. "I ain't a-goin' to feed 'im. It spiles houn's for rabbits. Jeff Whitt said so."

Dolly giggled. "That houn' spiled!" she mocked. "He's already the good-for-nothin'-est houn' in Yancy County. Pa said so."

"Huh!" the boy snsered. "You don't know nothin'--you're jest a gal."

"We'll tell Ma on you for sassin' us, Alex MacLean!" Polly cried. "You jest wait an' see if we don't!"

"An' we'll tell'er for you not feedin' 'im, too!"

Dolly assured him.

"G'wan--tell 'er," he muttered. "Tell 'er--an' see if I keer!"

When they accepted the challenge, he snatched Mose up and ran toward the barn with him--the hound's head and feet pendulous, like the sheep's on a Golden Fleece medal.

Phronie appeared in the kitchen door. "Where did he go, 'Genie?" she asked.

"He ran off--that way," Jean answered.

"Well, you tell 'im to feed that houn'," Phronie said. "If he don't--I'll jest take the livin' hide right off o' him!"

After which dire threat, she rejoined Mary on the porch.

Presently the men returned, with Little Alex lurking discreetly in their wake. "I shet 'im up in the corn crib," he whispered to Jean. "In the mornin' he'll be hungry--an' go an' ketch hisself some rabbit."

Jean, however, felt that the hound would not live until morning....

In the parlor, the grown-ups talked for a while, but the conversation obviously did not stimulate Trixie. With a bored yawn and a swish of her skirts, she took herself upstairs. Johnny already had slipped out. The twins, under Phronie's eye, could only whisper and giggle; Little Alex made faces at them for a few minutes--then went to sleep.

Presently Alex remembered Judson's fiddle. But after listening to Judson's and Jean's efforts for a few minutes, Mary and Phronie withdrew to a corner, where they could talk.

The twins began to nod; Little Alex snored energetically.

Trixie came back downstairs. "Can you play any new songs--like "Are You from Dixie?"--Uncle Jud?" she asked.

"If you can, I might sing it."

"Your Uncle Jud don't play that kind o' trash--an' you know it!" Phronie said indignantly. "An' your singin's nothin' but coon-shoutin'--we jest don't want to hear it."

Trixie tossed her head. "Well, it's got a little pep in it--if that's what you mean, Ma."

Dr. Boone chuckled. "I'd likemighty well to hear the young lady sing, if you don't mind, Missez MacLean," he said.

"Well, go ahead an' sing your song, Trixie--if Jud an' the little gal can play it," Alex told her. "I reckon it won't kill Phronie, this time."

"I can't play it, unless you've got the music," Judson said. "But 'Genie can, I reckon."

Trixie had no music for it, and she disregarded his assertion that Jean could play it as unworthy of comment. "There's a young feller over at the College that can play anything on a fiddle," she observed. "Rag-time--that old stuff Uncle Jud plays--jest anything. You jest ought to hear 'im, Uncle Jud."

"You mean that good-for-nothin' young Simmons squirt, I reckon," Alex said. "An' if I ketch him hangin' around that front porch again after supper--I'll come out an' break his neck for 'im--fiddlin' or no-fiddlin'!"

Trixie tossed her head, but did not reply.

"Jud said the little gal could play your song for ye, Miss Trixie," Dr. Boone reminded her.

The girl glanced at Jean. "Oh, there wouldn't be no use in my tryin' to sing it--with her."

"But I can play it, Cousin Trixie," Jean said brightly. "Sister Marion sent me the music. What key do you want me to play it in?"

"You mean--you can play it without the music, in any key?" Trixie was incredulous.

"Yes, it's easy, after you learn it," Jean said.

"Well, if it's so 'easy' -- jest do it!" Trixie challenged

Jean pumped the old organ a few times, to get it started, then played the song, verse and chorus, as she had done many times before. Any mistakes she might have made were not noticed by Trixie.

Alex guffawed. "Well, that's a sight mor'n you can do, Miss Trixie--with three year o' music-takin'," he taunted her. "Now le's see if you can sing it--as well as she can play it."

But the girl stamped her foot and glared at him. "I wouldn't sing it--not if you was to git down on your knees an' beg me!"

With another toss of her head and a contemptuous swish of her skirts, she went back upstairs and slammed the door of her room.

Alex observed: "That gal is jest gittin' too big for her breeches."

II

Presently Phronie said that it was time for all 'growin' young-'uns to be in bed'. Jean was assigned a cot in the twins' room, next to the one occupied by Phronie and Alex. She

watched the arrangement carefully--noted the door leading into the dining room and the one from that to the kitchen. She hoped that her aunt and uncle were sound sleepers--if they ever went to bed.

When Phronie closed the door and blew out the light, the twins began to whisper and giggle: "'Genie--are you awake?" Dolly hissed. "Listen--Trixie's got a feller! We saw 'im kiss 'er!" They both giggled.

"An' we told Pa," Polly whispered. "He said he'd take a hoss-whip to 'im--an' was Trixie mad at us! She still is--but we don't keer!"

There were more confidences and giggles. Then, after Phronie had come in and had threatened to switch them, the twins went to sleep. Finally Jean heard steps on the stairs, her aunt and uncle murmuring in the next room. Finally the murmuring gave way to an ear-jarring snore. Goodness! Jean thought, would her aunt ever go to sleep--with that beside her?

But Phronie did so finally, joining her own modest snore--a mere sizzling hiss--to the more vigorous strangling gurgle. When the volume had reached what seemed to be a norm of production, Jean slipped out of bed and tiptoed to the door. Thankful that the floor boards had not squeaked, she turned the door knob carefully. The hinges protested--they fairly shrieked!

In the next room Phronie mumbled rapidly: "Alex, that front door's blowed open. You go an' close it."

Jean scurried back to her cot and waited, but nothing happened. Presently Phronie's snore was mingled again with

the uninterrupted symphony of her spouse. Easing the door open a few inches more, Jean slipped through it and tiptoes to the kitchen. From the ice-box on the back porch she took a pan of spareribs she had seen Trixie leave there--stood hesitating with it a few moments on the back steps.

There was a moon, but it had gone behind some clouds. Maybe she ought to wait for it to come out....Glancing along the side of the house, she saw something dark leaning against the white-painted wall. When the moon came out, it became a ladder. But it meant nothing to her--then.

Carrying the pan, she followed the path to the barn yard gate. Her bare feet already were wet with dew--covered with dust. She would have to wipe her feet--she should have worn her slippers....

The two buggies had been left in the barn yard. Her dog would be asleep in Judson's. "Ted!" she whispered. "Where are you, Ted?"

The dog leaped out of the buggy, whining softly. Two figures sat up on the buggy seat. Jean gave a little 'ooh!'

"What are you a-doin'--snoopin' around here?" Trixie hissed.

"You--you scared me," Jean stammered.

"Well, if you start tattlin'--I'll wring your sneakin' little neck! That's what I'll do!"

"I--I just slipped out to--to feed Ol' Mose--"

"What business was it o' yourn? You git back into that house!"

"No," Jean said, "I'm goin' to feed Ol' Mose."

Trixie started to get out of the buggy. "I'll jest show you!" she snarled.

The man beside her spoke: "Let 'er alone! Do you want your ol' man out here?" He muttered something in a lower tone.

"Well--go on' feed 'im then," Trixie said. "An' git back into that house."

Still trembling with fright, Jean went on to the crib. As she opened the door, Mose came scrambling down from the heap of unshucked corn. He began to wolf the food, wagging his tail and whining his gratitude.

"Poor Mose," Jean whispered. "I'll not let you starve--you just see if I do!"

As she passed the buggies on the way back, Trixie called to her in a low tone: "Here--you!" Jean stopped.

Trixie said: "You don't have to tatttle on us. We're jest out here sparkin'--we ain't hurtin' nobody--an' it's nobody's business. You ain't a-goin' to tatttle on us--are you?"

"No, she ain't," the man said. "She ain't the tattlin' kind."

Jean said: "No, I won't. But I'm goin' to feed Mose, Trixie--every night while I'm here."

The man chuckled. "You feed 'im, kid. An' if we happen to be sparkin'--that's our business too."

III

When everybody was ready for breakfast next morning--except Little Alex, who was still on the back porch, rubbing his eyes with one hand and making distasteful gestures toward the wash basin with the other--Phronie demanded: "Where's

that young-'un?"

But he slipped into his chair a moment later--his face showing sketchy evidence of moisture-contact, his hair plastered wetly around his forehead. His father saved him from reproof, by assuming the 'blessin' expression'. This time he called on Dr. Boone.

To the Taylors' considerable surprise, the doctor bowed his head and said: "Most holy an' glorious Lord God, the Great Architect of the Universe, the giver of all good gifts an' graces: Be in our midst, an' bless us--this family, this food, an' especially, these children....Amen."

Mary and Phronie murmured 'amen', Jean noticed; but Alex and Judson muttered something else. It sounded to the child like 'smote-a-bee'! But--it just couldn't have been that....

Trixie sat across the table from her. Jean glanced at the older girl, but Trixie averted her eyes and tossed her head. Phronie noticed the action.

"What's the matter with you now, Trixie?" she demanded. "What are you a-tossin' an' a-scowlin' about, I'd like to know?"

The girl signed. "There ain't nothin' the matter with me, Ma," she retorted. "What do you have to start pickin' on me for?"

"I ain't a-pickin' on you, young lady!" Phronie exclaimed. "An' if I was--I've got a right to, I'd have you know!"

"Oh, stop it--both of you!" Alex commanded. Then he turned to the doctor: "I reckon the Lord jest wasn't a-listenin' to that blessin', Doc," he said ironically. "He's yo'self to the eggs, Jud--an' pass 'em."

Alex was a blacksmith. After breakfast Judson decided to go with him to his shop; Jean and Little Alex elected to accompany them. Dr. Boone said he would call on his old friend Dr. Gillespie. As Ol' Bunk had a loose shoe, Judson took the buggy.

"Well, I reckon you're a sure-enough disciple o' Tubalcain, Alex," Judson said, as MacLean built a fire on the forge.

"Yeah, Jud--I reckon I am."

Jean's ears pricked up.

"An' they say around here you're a 'cunnin' workman', too," Judson continued. "Sounded this mornin' like the Doc's done a little travelin'."

Alex pumped the bellows until the chunks of coal he had piled on the lighted shavings were aglow. "She's caught now, I reckon," he said. "Yeah, Jud--I noticed that."

Jean waited--watched her uncle pile on more coal, then turn to face Judson, still pumping automatically. "He don't belong over there, I reckon?"

"No."

Alex placed several horseshoes on the fire, blew them to a white heat. "Them automobiles are better'n they used to be--but they still ain't much," he said. Then: "You might--feel 'im out, Jud."

"I'll do that, Alex."

And that was all.

Wondering what it meant, Jean watched Alex take the whitest, hottest shoe from the fire, strike off the tips on the hardy with a blow each, then turn and set each calk with

two more blows. Fascinated, she watched him give the shoe two or three finishing taps, enlarge the nail-holes with a punch, then plunge it into the tub of water beside the anvil--where it hissed and sizzled a few moments, a finished shoe.

Alex fished it from the tub with his fingers, tossed it up and caught it, then pitched it across the shop to the pile by the door. Not it was ready for its destiny, Jean thought--Ol' Bunk's left hind-foot. She ran over and picked it up--the sentiment cost her a minor blister.

"Ouch!" she exclaimed. "It's still hot!"

Judson examined her finger. Alex applied some oil to it, from a bottle with a twisted-rag stopper. "This'll fix it," he chuckled. "My skin's tougher'n yours, honey."

Little Alex came in then with two bags of candy, and she forgot the blister. "Uncle Jud gimme two nickles," the boy explained. "I been to the store--an' here's you some candy."

"Goodness, you forgot to give your papa any, Cousin Alex!" she reminded him a few minutes later.

Little Alex shrugged. "Paw don't want none," he said. "Paw's chawin' tobaccer--jest watch 'im spit!"

Jean had been watching--and marveling. Alex hit a crack in the wall every time.

"Well, son," he observed to Little Alex, "reckon you could take time off from that candy long enough to build me a fire around Jake Holcombe's wagon tire? I got to swage it this mornin'."

"Unh-hunh," Little Alex assented--but it was merely rhetorical. He continued to consume candy. Jean, however, imagined the 'swaging'--whatever that meant--would be

interesting.

"I'll help you, Cousin Alex," she offered. "Come on, let's build it right now."

But Little Alex was not to be stampeded by a mere girl. "I got this candy to finish," he observed tolerantly--she could see that he had. "'Tain't nothin' but buildin' a fire, nohow."

His father felt otherwise. "Were you plannin' to start buildin' that fire this week?" he questioned sharply.

Sarcasm was wasted on Little Alex.

"Unh-hunh, I'm a-gonna build it, Paw--soonzieat thish candy," he mumbled.

Alex picked up a slat, gave the boy a whack on the seat of his overalls. "Git a-goin'!" he commanded.

But even then Little Alex moved with deliberation. "Didn't hurt none through my pants," he confided to Jean.

"What does he mean by 'swagin'' it?" she asked.

"Oh, it ain't nothin'," he yawned. "We jest build a fire around this ol' tire here--an' he cuts it, an' puts it back on. This here's stove-wood--here in this box," he added. "Pa keeps it to heat tires with."

He picked up a stick of kindling, examined it critically--placed it on the tire. Jean grabbed an armful. "How do you fix it?" she asked.

"Oh, jest sorta stack it on the tire--an' git some more," he explained with another yawn. "We gotta have a lotta wood."

Jean returned with a second load. "Hadn't you better whittle some shavings or something?" she asked.

"Hum--don't have to," he told her. "You jest pour coal-

oil on it, an' strike a match." He sat down to rest--her strenuousness wearied him.

"Here's another load," she said. "You fix it on the tire, Cousin Alex, while I carry it."

"Unh-hunh," he mumbled.

When she glanced at him again, he was asleep.

IV

Johnny agreed to stay in the shop that afternoon; the three men planned to go fishing. The twins, Jean, and Little Alex wanted to go too. But before they started, Phronie remembered something.

"Did you finish weedin' them ingurns, Little Alex--like I told you to this mornin'?" she asked.

Of course he had not weeded the onions. "I've been to the shop, Maw," he asserted. "I've been a-helpin' Paw swage a wagon tire. An' I've been a-workin'!-hard! Haven't I, Paw--haven't I, Uncle Jud--haven't I, 'Genie? You jest ast 'em, Maw!"

"I wouldn't exactly say 'hard'," Alex chuckled. "Would you, Jud?"

"Well, he did work some," Judson smiled.

"An' he went to the store," Jean put in hopefully.

"What did you send 'im to the store for, Alex?" Phronie questioned. "It's a mortal wonder he got back from it. He don't--hardly ever."

Which was scarcely accurate; Little Alex always returned--eventually. Judson explained about the candy. "The boy come right back, Phronie," he told her.

Little Alex already had begun to whine--a tentative, dismal prelude. But here was a point in his favor. "Yes, I did, Maw!" he urged. "I didn't stop at the store one minute--you jest ast Gus. He sez, 'What's your hurry, son?' An' I sez, 'I've gotta go right back'--an' I did, Maw! You can jest ast--anybody!"

But Phronie was adamant. "I could--but I ain't a-goin' to," she stated. "You git right out there an' start weedin' them ingurns--git!"

Grasping him by the shirt collar, she propelled him toward the garden. His prelude and interlude having proved futile, Little Alex started yelling a sforzando: "Please, Maw--do-wanna weed no stinkin' ingurns! Ouch, Maw--you're a-hurtin' me! Ouch! Ouch! (spank, spank!) Maw--you're a-killin' me! Ouch--ouch--OUCH!!!"

And on through the gate, to the 'stinkin' ingurns'.

But Phronie relented when the others were ready to start. Little Alex came galloping up to the buggy. "I'm a-goin', Paw!" he shouted. "I ain't got no more ingurns to week--I kin go!"

At the fishing stream Alex, a fast fisherman, started up the creek, with the boy trailing after him. Judson and the doctor, who liked to take their time, went down-stream. The twins had not come to fish. They began to wade in the creek, their skirts pinned around their hips in a sort of Salome-drape. Jean elected to go with Judson and the doctor.

Getting not bites, however, presently the two men sat on a big rock and talked. "I reckon you've traveled some, Doc," Judson observed. Jean's ears pricked up again.

"Yes, Jud, I have."

"In England?"

"Yes."

"Alex an' me figgered you had."

And they had said 'smote-a-bee', Jean remembered.

"Ever think o' demittin' over here?" Judson questioned.

Dr. Boone did not answer for several moments. "I've thought of it--but I violated my obligation to a man once, Jud," he stated. "It didn't mean nothin' to me...then. But it does now..an' I'd be a hypocrite."

Judson asked: "Knowin'ly or wittin'ly, Doc? We're all--jest human bein's, you know."

Dr. Boone hesitated again. "I reckon it wasn't knowin'ly or wittin'ly....I didn't even think about it. An' the man never knew about it."

"Did it hurt him?"

"No, it done 'im good."

Judson was bewildered. "I jest don't exactly see--"

"Look here, Jud," the doctor said. "Would you be willin' to set in lodge with a man that'd done you a moral wrong--an' wasn't sorry, because it had turned out good?"

"Yes, I'd be willin' to, Doc."

"Would you figger the man should tell you--if that would do more harm than good?"

"No, that would be up to the man's conscience--an' judgment--I reckon."

"Well--I'm glad you feel that way about it, anyway," Dr. Boone said. "I'll think about it....I reckon it 'ould surprise some folks over there if I was to write an' ask for

a demit. They've marked me off their books as dead long ago--haw-haw!"

Jean was disappointed; there was no mystery about it after all. By the word 'lodge' she knew they meant the Masons.

"Papa," she questioned, "what does 'smote-a-bee' mean?"

Both men chuckled. "It's jest another way o' sayin' 'amen', honey," Judson told her.

Ol' Mose began barking up the creek. Maybe he would catch a rabbit, she thought, and would not need feeding that night. Presently she returned with Judson and the doctor to the buggies.

The twins, now, were catching June bugs--tying threads to their legs. The bugs zoomed around their heads at a dizzy speed, their green-and-gold armor flashing in the sun. Now and then one would hit a twin in the face or drawl down her neck. As giggle-provokers the June bugs were without peers; but their legs pulled off. Jean wondered if the escaped bugs would grow other legs.

Presently Alex and his diminutive appeared up the road.

"Hey, 'genie--hey, Uncle Jud--hey, everybody!" the boy shouted. "I kotched three trouts! An' Ol' Mose kotched hisself a rabbit, too!"

Mose had eaten the rabbit, with Little Alex' approval; but unknown to the boy, he had been stealing the trout from the forked stick upon which his master carried them. Snatching the last of the three, the hound started bolting it.

Little Alex, noting the final theft, uttered a howl of anguish. "Paw--oh, Paw! He's et my trouts--an' now I ain't

got none to show Maw!"

"Here, son," Alex grinned. "I'll give you three o' mine."

Mollified, but still muttering dire threats against Mose, Little Alex stuffed the trout into the pockets of his overalls.

CHAPTER V

I

The trip to Burnsville worked as the doctor had hoped it would. For weeks after their return she talked and thought about it--and the tragedy at the mill dimmed to a blurred memory.

Of all her cousins, however, Trixie interested her most. Although Mary condemned her as a 'good-for-nothin' piece that would come to no good end', Jean sensed vaguely in the older girl something of the cornered animal that snaps and snarls at its tormenters.

And from her reading of serial romances in the 'Asheville Citizen', Jean already had gleaned the philosophy that Amor omnia vincet--is justified in doing so. Trixie, too, when she had seen that the child was not going to tattle, had treated Jean with more respect, had even complimented her music. The next stage in her cousin's romance, Jean reasoned, would be an elopement.

"Dang my ol' duodenum, Jud," Dr. Boone said one evening on the porch, "I hear they're a-talkin' down at that jackass College o' puttin' up a memorial to ol' Dan'el Boone."

"Yes, there's some talk of it, Doc."

"Well, I'll swear an' be durned," the doctor chuckled, "that I've done more for this town--gittin' it born, keepin' it alive, an' lettin' it die easy--than he ever did. What the hell did he do--except jest pass through here?"

He had 'cilled a bar, on tree, in the year 1760', Judson remembered. But the tree was not very close to Boonville. "You've done a heap o' good here, Doc," he said. "We jest couldn't git along without you."

"You'd git along without me--fine," the doctor stated. "That whiffle-breeches that took my practice when we went to Burnsville--he'd jump at the chance o' movin' in here. Yeah, they could git along without me, all right. But they don't know it, an' I ain't a-goin' to tell 'em."

"Well, we're both past our prime, Doc," Judson said thoughtfully. "If I could jest keep on till the child finishes her schoolin'--"

"Hoss-Manure!" the doctor scoffed. "Jes plain, stinkin' hoss-manure! You sound like you had one foot in the grave--an' the other a-draggin' dirt to cover you up. Why--dang my rotten ol' eye-teeth!--you're nothin' but a bloody striplin'. One o' your grand-dads lived to be a hundred."

"Well, they lived longer in them days."

"Some did--more didn't," the doctor stated. He glanced toward Boonville's main street--unnamed, although it had been a thoroughfare of sorts for over a hundred years. Just then, after a rain, it was two feet deep in mud--the reddest mud known to man.

"They ought to call that street the 'Slough o' Despond',

Jud," he declared. "A town that leaves its streets like that jest as well might kick the bucket, an' be done with it."

"Boonville ain't the worst town in the world, though," Judson defended it.

"No, it's only the second-worst," Dr. Boone chuckled. "There's Marshall."

Marshall was a railroad and factory town on the French Broad River, some ten miles from Boonville. Merely to mention both places in the same breath would cause most Boonville-ites to gnash their teeth.

"Now, Doc, you jest ain't bein' reasonable," Judson declared. "Boonville's a decent place to live in; Marshall ain't."

"Haw-haw! Do you know what they say about us in Marshall?"

"They've got mighty little right to say anything."

"Well--they say it, anyhow," the doctor chuckled. "They say this town's so dam' clean you can smell the soap-suds the minute you leave the river an' turn up Wildcat Holler! They say it ain't safe for an ordinary man to walk our streets. He jest might contaminate our mud--haw-haw!"

"If Boonville's so bad though, why do you keep on livin' here, Doc?"

"Dang my hid, I jest come here--an' started laughin'," Dr. Boone grinned. "An' I can't quit long enough to leave."

Jean began to take piano lessons the following year, from Mrs. Wilson, the piano teacher at Corinth. At first the lessons were a disappointment to the child, for most of the technic she had learned at home had to be changed or modified.

But after Mrs. Wilson had played for her--with the skill and expression of a trained musician--the monotonous scales and exercises assumed a new meaning. Jean resolved to become a great pianist like Mrs. Wilson.

That fall her sister Marion came for a visit, bringing her baby--"Little Woodie", named for Woodrow Wilson. A husky infant of nine or ten months, he seemed tiny and helpless to Jean; but his pliability amazed her. Marion would bundle him around as though he were a small sack of meal, would drape him on his stomach across her knees and would yank and pull at him as she changed his diapers, without breaking him, or even hurting him. And when dumped unceremoniously into the old bassinet, he would wriggle from the pillow, bring his toes up to his mouth and coo ecstatically. Jean hovered over him--at first. Judson and Mary did so too.

Many of Marion's friends and acquaintances came to see her; and all of them, of course, had to admire the baby. So Jean found herself in the background--a new experience for her. But it did not occur to her to be jealous of Little Woodie--she was his 'own-born aunt'! The novelty of him, however, began to wear off after a week or so.

One afternoon Hammer Bill's Lindy came. "I jest had to drap up an' see you an' the baby, Miss Marion," she said. "Lawdy, lawdy--he's the spittin' image of his maw. 'n' he's shore purtier'n a pitcher!"

"I'm glad you came," Marion said. "How are Hammer Bill an' the children?"

"They're all well an' doin' well," Lindy said. "We've got eight now, countin' the baby."

"That's too many," Marion declared. "Two's all I'm goin' to have."

"Lawdy, Miss Marion," Lindy cackled, "I'd stop in a minute--if Hammer Bill would!"

Marion laughed--but Mary was scandalized. "That's no way for you to be a-talkin', Marion," she said sternly. "An' before that child, too!"

"Oh, don't be so old-fashioned, Ma," Marion said. "People don't have children now unless they want 'em, an' you know it."

"I don't know it!" Mary snapped at her. "I had one, I reckon--when I was forty years old!"

Then she noticed Jean. "'Genie, you shan't listen to any such talk--even if your sister is a-doin' it," she said. "Jest go to your room--or out in the yard. I don't keer which."

But Jean already had listened, had understood that she had not been wanted....

Next morning, when Marion gave her Little Woodie to look after, Jean kept him for half an hour, then brought him back to his mother. "You take him, Sister Marion," she said. "I want to read."

Both Marion and Mary were scandalized.

"'Genie Taylor, I'll be ashamed o' you--to my dyin' day!" Mary exclaimed. "You, not wantin' to look after your sister's little--helpless--innocent child!"

"Doesn't marion want him?" Jean asked.

"Well--I must say!" Marion cried indignantly. "If that's the way you feel about it--you just shan't touch him again!"

When Mary had finished her harangue about 'pride' and 'selfishness', Jean went out to the stable loft and cried.

II

When Judson learned of the incident, he tried to smooth matters over. Jean was still a child, he reminded Marion, and maybe 'jest a little spoiled'. But for the remainder of her visit Marion was extremely cool to Jean, ignoring her when she could. Jean kept away from her and from Little Woodie. And when they had gone, she continued to be moody--indifferent to her food, to her reading, and to her piano practice.

Finally Judson went to Dr. Boone about her.

"Maybe there's nothin' wrong--Mary says there ain't," he said. "But the child's actin' mighty strange, Doc."

"Have you any idea what's troublin' 'er?"

Judson told him about the disagreement with Marion.

"It's somethin' else--somethin' one of 'em said to 'er, or that she heard 'em say," the doctor stated. "Women haven't a brain in their heads--no more idea o' what they're a-sayin' than a crow with a slit tongue. Bring the little gal down here, Jud, an' let me talk to 'er."

Judson did so that evening--over Mary's protest that there was nothing wrong with Jean except stubbornness and selfishness. But the doctor's questions failed to reveal anything he considered significant. Finally he glanced at Judson, who nodded.

"How'd you like to come down here an' work for me, honey?" he asked Jean.

Her face brightened. "Could I, Papa?"

"Maybe--if you could do the work," Judson temporized.

"Well," the doctor said, "that good-for-nothin' nigger Wash an' his wife--that work for me--are a-takin' themselves a vacation next week. An' I've got to have some likely-lookin' gal to stay here mornin's an' evenin's. It might as well be you, 'Genie.'"

"Could I, Papa?" Jean begged.

Judson hesitated.

"I--I'll speak to your mother about it," he promised.

"Jest leave Mary to me," the doctor said. "I'll handle Mary."

Neither Judson nor Jean share his confidence that he could do so, however. And neither was present when he broached the matter to her the following morning. Judson was at the court house; Jean had gone to the post office.

Both were surprised therefore, when she said gruffly at noon: "John Boone wants that child to stay in his office a few days, Jud--an' I reckon she can."

Jean was delighted. "Just think, Mama!" she cried. "He's goin' to pay me--fifty cents a day!"

"Well, it won't hurt the child to earn a little somethin'," Judson said. "Not every one her age could do it, Mary."

"No good'll come of it, though--you mark my words, Jud Taylor," Mary stated grimly.

Judson wondered why she had consented...

Next morning the child skipped down the street with him, as he went to the court house, and hugged him as she left him in front of it. Dr. Boone was waiting for her in his office.

"When I leave, I'll write down where I'm goin', in case somebody wants to git me in a hurry," he told her. "An' if anybody calls while I'm gone, you jest write down their name an' what they want, 'Genie. That's all--except answerin' the telephone."

Jean eyed that with considerable trepidation, however. She had never talked over a telephone. Dr. Boone had had it installed recently, and was not especially expert at using it himself, as it developed.

"If it starts to ring--rings two longs an' a short, you jest take this dingus down an' yell 'hello!'" he explained. "Here--I'll show you."

He turned the crank three vigorous spurts, then began to yell into the mouthpiece: "Hello--hello--hello! Dang it--hello!!.....Oh - hello! Is that you, Wigginhorn?.....Yeah, this is Doc Boone.... Hello - can't you hear me?.... Well, I can't hear you neither...haw-haw!.....What?.....This danged thing's buzzin' like a thrashin' machine-- thrashin' machine!... What?.....Hell, no! I don't want no thrashin' machine!... What?.....No--buzzin' like one!!.....No!!--jest hold it a minute!"

He stopped to wipe the perspiration from his face. "Might as well jest open the winder an' yell!" he muttered.

Jean thought he had been yelling.

Then he essayed to continue the conversation. Standing back from the instrument, the receiver clutched in his left hand, he glared at the telephone and shouted 'hello!' again--kept shouting it for half a minute, getting redder in the face with each shout. Jean saw his clinched right fist--

thought he was going to smash the instrument. But the fist jammed into his pocket for his handkerchief; and after a final burst of shouts--which gradually diminished in volume to a hoarse whisper--he stopped to mop his face again.

Then a mechanical, whining "Hello, Doc! Are you still there?" came over the wire. Jean could hear it where she was sitting. Dr. Boone threw down his handkerchief--stamped on it.

"Yes--you danged fool!" he shouted--in a whisper. "Where did ye think I was?"

"That's fine, Doc--I can hear you fine," the whining continued. "What do you want?"

"I want another box o' that arnica an' witch-hazel salve fixed up for Ol' Misses Pratt!" the doctor shouted again, his voice restored by the brief rest. "Can ye hear me?"

"What did you say, Doc?"

"Arnicey--witch-hazel--salve!!" Dr. Boone hissed. "Ol' Misses Pratt--piles!!"

"O. K., Doc--I'll fix it right up."

"An' say," the other boomed into the instrument, "call me back in about ten minutes--willyou?"

"What?"

"Let it go!" he shouted, jamming the receiver on the hook.

He sat down--mopped his face, the back of his neck.

"Well, I'll jest go down an' git that salve--an' call you myself, honey," he told Jean.

When he had gone, she sat trembling--listening for the 'two longs and a short', repeating over and over in her mind what she was to say. But she was in despair--she could never

attain the doctor's volume of sound. He would have to get somebody else...

Then it rang.

Standing on a chair, she lifted the receiver--it was buzzing like a bumble-bee in a bottle! Placing her lips close to the transmitter, she murmured a weak 'hello'--and waited.

But instead of the doctor's roar, a quiet voice came over the wire: "Is this Dr. Boone's office?"

"Yes, sir!" she whispered.

"May I speak to the doctor?"

"He--he isn't here," Jean stammered. She had forgotten to say where he had gone.

"Do you know where I can find him?" the voice questioned. "This is Professor Starke, down at the college."

"He--he just went to the drug store," Jean managed.

"Thank you, very much," Professor Starke said. "I'll call him there. Good-by."

Jean heard a click--murmured, "Good-by."

She had understood Professor Starke--and he had understood her! Jean knew that she could do it now. On the pad the doctor had left her she wrote carefully, "Professor Stork telephoned".

When the doctor's ring came a few minutes later, she lifted the receiver and said primly: "Hello, please--this is Dr. Boone's office."

She heard the doctor chuckle. "Hello, honey--this is me," he boomed. "I jest called to say you don't need no practice. Starke got me down here, like you told him to. You're a-doin' fine--an' I'll be back at half-past ten."

Jean said good-by--this time before the receiver clicked--and wrote on the pad, "Back at $\frac{1}{2}$ past 10".

III

That afternoon Dr. Boone told her about 'Jeremiah', whose skull grinned at her from the top of the instrument cabinet. The rest of 'Jerry' hung from a nail driven into the closet door behind the doctor's desk. When the door opened, the skeleton's arms and legs clacked against it like castanet.

"Why are his bones so brown?" she questioned.

"Maybe it's jest because Jerry was a Negro, honey," he grinned. Then he told her that the Negro had been hanged for murder, buried in Richmond, Virginia.

"A bunch o' medical students--an' another feller--sneaked out to the graveyard an' dug 'im up," he explained. "It was rainin' like sin. They took Jerry over to the medical school an' dissected 'im. Fine set o' muscles--but his brain wasn't much. You can see where we sawed that skull there, to git it out."

He chuckled again at Jean's shudder. "It didn't hurt 'im any--he was dead," he assured her. "An' we done it so we'd know how to save the lives o' livin' people, honey. That's the way doctors learn to be doctors."

"Do you suppose--he has a ghost?"

"Well--I've never seen it around her," he temporized. "Maybe it jest stayed up there in Richmond, where he killed the feller....Funny thing about Jerry," he went on. "He was no good whatever, livin'--an' when he died, he helped save a heap o' lives. If his ghost is a-hangin' around, it ought to be proud o' that."

Jerry had been a person, she mused....Maybe he'd had a wife and a lot of children, like Hammer Bill and Lindy...And now--he was a skeleton in a closet....She too would be a skeleton, someday....

The doctor saw her shudder again. "What are you thinkin' about, honey?"

"I hate to think of -- of dying...."

"Dyin' don't matter," he said. "That bag-o-bones there-- they're no more than sticks o' stove-wood. An' your body, the minute you git through with it, is like a wore-out pair o' shoes....No, dyin'--an' gittin' born--jest don't matter. The only thing that counts is livin'....."

Jean pondered that; the doctor puffed at his pipe-- waited....

"Do mamas--sometimes--not want their babies?" she asked.

"The question surprised him--but he had heard Mary 'knocking herself down with a feather' for the past nine years.

"When an ol' hen lays an egg, she cackles, honey," he said thoughtfully. "Some ol' hens jest naturally keep on cacklin' for the rest o' their lives...You git two of 'em together, an' they start cluckin' about their children--how good this 'un was, an' how bad that 'un was. But it don't mean nothin' -- they're still cacklin', honey."

"Are all mamas like that?"

"You can jest bet your bottom dollar they are," he assured her. "An' the meaner one o' them little chickens is, the more the ol' hen likes it, too."

That was it, he realized. Jean knew that she had not been wanted..

Presently he arose and took from a shelf a glass jar filled with something that looked to Jean like hay and water. She watched him take a little of the liquid in a medicine dropper and spread it on a glass slide--place it under the lens of his big microscope.

"Here are some little critters you might be interested in," he told her as he prepared the slide. "Can't even see 'em with your naked eye--so we'll jest let this microscope puff 'em up about fifty times. They're called protozoans, honey. They've got their family names, an' private names too, jest like you have. This one's a paramecium..."

Jean was amazed and delighted. She had a million questions to ask. Dr. Boone answered the ones she did ask patiently and carefully, pitching his explanations to the level of her child's understanding.

"Bring a few flowers tomorrow, honey--any kind," he said before she went home that night. "Bring 'em roots an' all. I'll jest show you a few things about plants, too."

That evening she plied Judson and Mary with a vivid account of the paramecium. Judson was interested mildly--thought he had read something about such creatures; but both he and Mary had a vague idea that the little animals were some kind of germ. Theirs had been the age of 'microbes'.

"You'll jest ketch somethin' from that things, 'Genie Taylor," Mary declared. "John Boone's got little to do--exposin' you to it."

Jean hastened to assure her that the paramecium was an animal--and not ferocious. Seized with a great fear that Mary

might forbid her going to the doctor's office, the child talked no more about the 'bugs'. But he continued to show her things and tell her about them--amoeba, sponges, worms; chloryphil, and the way plants 'breathed'; the life-history of moths and butterflies.

Jean grew to look upon him as a repository of universal knowledge, but he hastened to disillusion her. "I jest specialized in medicine, honey," he said. "There are a million other things--an' millions who know more about 'em than I do."

Then he went on to tell her about the thousands of highly trained specialists in every field--applying what had been learned in the past, hunting for new facts to apply.

"Do they teach things like that in the Free School--in Corinth?" Jean questioned.

"A few of 'em, I reckon," he evaded.

Buthe knew that Boonville and Corinth eschewed science--because it did not hook up with Adam and Eve. "If they knew about 'em--which they don't," he told himself, "I reckon them Baptist 'ould say the Lord created protozoans an' the like for the special confusion o' the Methodist!"

IV

In September, after Jean was ten years old, her Aunt Phronie drove to Boonville with Johnny. But he stayed in the buggy when Phronie got out--seemed afraid to come in. Jean saw her mother and her aunt exchange their usual stiff embrace and peck-like kiss; then Phronie began to weep on Mary's shoulder.

"I'm ashamed to look you in the face, Mary Taylor!"

Phronie said. "Yes, I'm ashamed--ashamed! I never thought to see the day--!"

She began to weep again.

"Now, Phronie, don't take on so," Mary soothed her. "Jest tell me what ails you. Whatever it is, you'll feel better to tell me."

"No, I jest kain't, Mary!" Phronie sobbed. "I jest kain't bring myself to say the words -- words I never thought to say in my mortal life -- about a child o' mine!"

"Is it -- Trixie?"

"Yes, it is, Mary. She's -- jest gone an' played out!"

Mary lifted her hands in horror. "Phronie MacLean--you could knock me down with a feather!"

Jean knew -- vaguely -- that 'playing out' meant having an illegitimate child....

CHAPTER VI

I

When she was thirteen, Jean started to the "Free School"-- and was graduated from it at the end of the term. Mary had refused to let her go until she realized she was no longer capable of teaching the child. Jean was asking for Latin and algebra--was ready for them.

Neither Mary nor Judson went with her the first day. It did not occur to either of them to do so. But Mary actually complimented her on her appearance before Jean left home that morning.

"You look right nice, 'Genie,'" she said grimly. "See that you beha/ve as well as you look."

Judson said: "You're mighty pretty, honey. An' I reckon you're jest about grown up, too."

But when she entered the school room, with its groups of noisy boys and giggling, chattering girls, Jean felt neither pretty nor grown up. She had met most of them at Sunday School, but she was not one of them; she had never played with them. Now she realized she was ignorant. She knew nothing about school--she didn't even know where to sit....

As she looked around the room--uncertain, frightened--two girls saw her and began to giggle. A boy stared at her and grunted: "Huh! Look what the cat drug in!"

The harried teacher, Miss Fisher, was struggling to organize the four upper grades she was to teach in the one room. She did not see Jean; but one of the older girls--Kate Young--did. She called: "Jest come an' set down, 'Genie--she's busy."

With a sigh of relief, Jean slipped into a seat across the aisle from Kate; and when she glanced around the room, she saw that nobody was paying any attention to her.

A big boy shouted: "Hi-yah, Kate! What you takin' this year?"

Kate answered: "I can't hear you--come over here."

He came and stood in the aisle between her and Jean, talked to the older girl. Then he glanced at Jean. "Hi-yah, sis--what you takin'?"

She remembered his name--Sam Baron. His father rented the big Carter farm next to Judson's small one, on Gabriel's Creek. "I'm Takin' the same she is," Jean said.

He glanced at her again. "Weren't you out on Gabriel's Creek with your dad last week?" he questioned.

Jean said: "Yes, I saw you--you were pitchin' hay."

He turned to include Kate in the conversation. "I'll say I was! We raked up a copperhead in one o' them shocks. An' while I was stackin', my dad pitched it up to me--without seein' it. You should a-seen me dancin' around that stack-pole, Kate!"

"Goodness--did it bite you?"

Jean murmured, "Goodness!"

"No, I shoved it off with my pitch-fork," he said; "an' Dad killed it."

Miss Fisher jangled the bell on her desk. "Seats, please!" she commanded sharply. The theory of seating was to put the good ones in the back and the bad ones in front. Miss Fisher put Kate and Jean together, in the back row.

Sam sprang up, waved his hand. "Let me set back there, Miss Fisher," he begged. "I'll be good this year--honest!"

"Will you, Sam?"

"Yes--if you'll let Chet Bradley set with me."

Chet Bradley had returned from France with a disability and several wound stripes; naturally, he was not in grammar school for fun. Miss Fisher assented to the arrangement, and Sam slid into the seat next to Kate and Jean's. "Howdy, folks!" he grinned.

A few moments later big Chet, his arms full of books, lumbered down the aisle and sat down beside him. Sam twiddled his thumbs, looked at Kate owlishly. "Say somethin', Chet--durn you!" he hissed.

Kate and Jean giggled, and Chet smiled--but said nothing.

Kate said: "Don't mind Sam--he's jest crazy."

Same said: "All right for you--Catherine Chlotildy!"

"My name's Kate--smarty!"

"Sure it is--but you changed it."

"Well--what if I did?"

When Miss Fisher passed around the roll sheet for everybody to sign, Jean wrote--for the first time--"Jean Taylor".

II

There were many rules at the Free School, and few of them were popular with the students. There was one forbidding the girls from being on the boys' playgrounds. One day Kate said to Jean: "Let's go back an' watch 'em play ball. Maybe she won't see us."

They did so--and somebody tattled to Miss Fisher.

"I am surprised at you, Kate--and at you, Jean," she said. "You have broken a rule deliberately."

"There's no harm in our watchin' those boys play ball," Kate said. "The rule's crazy."

"I have considered that harm might come of it," Miss Fisher said. "You and Jean may stay in half an hour after school."

The thought of being punished frightened Jean at first; but Kate accepted the penalty philosophically, merely grumbling about the silliness of the rule. While they waited the extra half-hour, Jean achieved an idea.

"Why couldn't we play ball, Kate?"

"Help!" Kate giggled. "Miss Fisher would have a fit!"

"Why?"

"Well--she'd say it ain't lady-like. An' the boys would hang around watchin' us--lookin' at our legs."

"Your legs are pretty, Kate."

"Well--I don't want a bunch o' boys starin' at 'em. An' sayin' things."

Jean couldn't understand that. Kate's legs were rounded and tapering--entirely worthy of inspection. Why should she object to the boys' looking at them--commenting on them? But Kate was inordinately conscious of them--was forever pulling and tugging at her skirts.

"Why couldn't we just wear overalls?" Jean asked.

Kate pondered the idea. No Boonville or Corinth girl would have ventured to wear trousers. On feminine legs, they--like the legs--became indecent. And any trouser-clad woman or girl appearing on Boonville's streets would have become a subject for immediate pulpit discussion--probably, of legal action....

But overalls....

Kate said: "Let's go talk to Miss Fisher."

The teacher was a queer mixture of old-maidish prudery and stubborn common sense. She resented all implications that women belonged to the 'weaker sex'--and she had played 'one-ol'-cat' with her brothers when she was a girl....

"I shall take it up with the school board," she promised.

"I never thought she'd listen to us," Kate said later.

"But--I'd jest like to see that school board when she asks 'em! Ol' Josh Sellers'll have a fit!"

III

Deacon Sellers was chairman of the board. When Miss Fisher presented the matter of the overalls, he arose and cleared his throat.

"Pants!" he shouted. "Womern--an' pants!"

His voice dropped an octave to show that he repudiated the combination--abominated it--eschewed it. "Men are supposed to wear pants, ma'am!" he thundered at Miss Fisher. "They jest ain't got no place on a womern. They ain't decent on 'er--they're immoral, immodest--an' God Almighty never intended 'er to wear 'em! If He had--He'd a-said so!"

Miss Fisher knew the deacon--and her Bible.

She said: "If I prove to you that the women of the Bible wore trousers, Deacon, will you agree to the overalls?"

"I will--but ye kain't show me!" he shouted. "It jest ain't in God's Word--an' I defy ye to show me!"

The meeting was being held at the school house. Miss Fisher arose and went to her desk, took her Bible from a drawer. Then she said:

"The boys have an adequate playground, gentlemen. They grubbed the stumps--made it themselves. But there is no place for the girls except our small front yard. There is no equipment for them to play any kind of game, except little children's games; none of the girls have gym suits; there is no dressing room, anyway.

"The girls have asked permission to wear overalls over their dresses and play baseball. I feel that both requests are reasonable, but I had no authority to--"

"You didn't!" Sellers cut in. "An' if you had--"

"Shet up, Sellers!" Joe Sprinkle said. "Let 'er talk."

"That's all," Miss Fisher said. "Naturally, I shall abide by your decision, gentlemen."

"How about the Bible?" John Anderson asked. "If the women wear pants in it, Sellers has to give his consent. An' the rest of us will anyway."

"No," she said, "the real question is: Will this concession harm the morals of our girls? If it will--"

"Now you're jest tryin' to slide out o' it!" Sellers jeered. "It ain't in that Bible--an' you know it ain't! If it is let 'em wear overalls. Let 'em sleep in 'em--for all I keer!"

Sprinkle snapped: "Come on, Sellers--put the vote."

The deacon arose again, cleared his throat: "You men--upright, God-fearin' men o' this community," he harangued them, "do you--considerin' the virtue, the chastity, of your mothers, wives, an' daughters--considerin' the morals o' children yet unborn--yes, I say, do you--realizin' your responsibility as leadin' citizens o' this community--recognizin' your humbleness before your Maker--knowin' an' realizin' all them things--believe that them gals should be let wear pants?"

"If you do--if you do--jest raise your right hands!"

All members present did so, except himself.

"Well, you've voted it," he said disgustedly; "an' you'll regret the day you done it."

Then he turned to Miss Fisher. "An' now, ma'am--will you jest show me that passage o' Scripture?"

"You'll admit that the men and women of Bible times

didn't wear the same kind of garments, won't you, Deacon? she asked.

"I ain't admittin' nothin'. Youjest show me that Scripture!"

"Well--I shall read from the twenty-second chapter of Deuteronomy, fifth verse," she said: "'The women shall not wear that which pertaineth to a man, neither shall a man put on a woman's garment....'"

"Ain't that jest what I said?" he shouted. "If that's Scripture for 'em to wear pants--then I'm a jackass!"

"The other board members shuffled uneasily, but Miss Fisher merely smiled. "I shall read from the same chapter," she said: "'A man shall not take his father's wife, nor discover his father's skirt....'"

"That," she said gravely, "is the thirteenth verse, Deacon. And if the men wore skirts--isn't it reasonable to assume the women wore trousers?"

IV

Jean passed the age of puberty without advice--or warning--from her mother. At first the girl was acutely terrified; she went to Mary about it. But her mother said grimly that it was 'the lot o' women'--a curse sent upon them because of Eve's participation in Original Sin--and refused to discuss it further. That it might have anything to do with her potentiality as a mother did not even occur to Jean.

Dr. Boone had spoken to Judson about her, however. "She's goin' to be a woman--Mary ought to have sense enough to tell 'er a few things," he had said. "An' if she hasn't got enough--I'll give 'Genie a few things to read for herself."

But Jean's crisis of puberty had passed before the doctor found an opportunity to do so. That came one Saturday when she was staying in his office. Wash and his wife had gone to a funeral.

"Jest take a look at that--an' read about it--while I'm makin' my calls, 'Genie,'" he said, pointing to a big book open on his desk. "It's somethin' you ought to know about. When I git back, you can ask me any questions about it you want to."

When he had gone, Jean looked at the book--saw the word 'Opstetrics' at the top of the pages. That was meaningless to her, however. She looked at the red-limned diagrams, accurate scientific drawings, showing a child in its mother's womb....

Her mind became a battle of emotions: of horror and nausea at the bare realism suddenly thrust upon her; of wonder at the ugly, seemingly-sleeping baby-creature curled inside its mother--like a worm in a chestnut; of conjecture as to how it got there....She had seen Little Woodie draw his fat, crooked little legs up--just like that....

But children were their fathers' children too....

Then she remembered that sometimes two protozoans joined before reproducing--'as in the higher animals'....

All Mary's false modesty, the feeling of her rigid taboos on the question of sex, had been ground into Jean's consciousness. As she drew the obvious conclusions, she felt guilty--wicked, ashamed--as though she were prying into mysteries which might carry eternal damnation as a penalty for their discovery.... And those were the things her fellows at the Free School had snickered, goggled, and whispered about....

But--could it be wicked to be born, to have children--even in that way? She thought of all the millions of children that must have been born--in that way.....Even the Christ-Child--born in a manger....

Where-- and what-- was the wrong?

Then she remembered: "Thou shalt not commit adultery", which she had memorized before she could read--which no one ever had explained to her. And all the Bible stories of adultery, fornication, and incest which she had wondered at as she read them came back to her--Lot and his daughters, Judah and Tamar, Shechem and Dinah, Absalom and another Tamar, David and Bathsheba....

Ruth, she remembered, had got in bed with Boaz--before they were married....Trixie had 'played out' with Cal Simmons; but he had married her later--had given the child a name....

Turning the pages, she read the paragraphs Dr. Boone had marked for her. She was a good enough reader and mature enough mentally to understand it--to understand such expressions as 'vulgar cant', 'the fog of superstition', 'old wives' tales', 'ignorance and false modesty about the processes of life-generation'. God had ordained those processes, she thought....

And Mary had told her that babies came from heaven....

CHAPTER VI

I

Jean started to Corinth College a few months after her fourteenth birthday. Kate Young, Sam Baron, and Chet Bradley were in her class. The word 'college', however, was a misnomer as applied to Corinth. The institution's charter, granted

before the Civil War, said that it was to be a college; but in its curriculum, teaching staff, and equipment the school had not yet achieved the standards of a good city high school. The title sounded big, however; and Corinth attempted to give itself the airs of a college.

That is, some of it did. Professor Starke, its president, had no illusions about its status.

Boonville in general found much fault with Corinth. Those who had attended it twenty years before said it was not what it used to be; and those who had not been able to finish grammar school declared that it was run by a passel of educated fools. But its graduates were scattered all over the state, others dispersed throughout the nation; and most of them were loyal to it. The thinking ones realized that Corinth had done the best it could.

The man who already had become a tradition at Corinth when Jean started there, who continued to guide its destinies for years after she left, was 'Professor' Calvin Starke. No one ever called him 'Doctor', 'Prexie', or 'Reverend'--he was an ordained preacher. To thousands in North Carolina, and to a few as far away as China and India, he was Professor Starke.

Although a friend of its president, Dr. Boone was openly contemptuous of Corinth.

"Dang my ol' hide," he would say, "what do they expect--with a bunch o' run-down preachers an' ol' maids that couldn't git a man, for a faculty? 'College'--my back sides! They're a bunch o' second-rate cobblers--tryin' to make silk purses outa third-rate sows' ears!"

But Professor Starke, to whom the doctor frequently addressed his criticisms, would smile and ask: "But what can we do, Doctor?"

"Do!" Dr. Boone would snort, "Use a little common sense! About nine-tenths o' them glorified morons you're tryin' to turn into preachers might--they jest might--qualify as plumbers or brick-layers. Anyway--what the hell do you want with more preachers? The ones you've got ain't worth a dime a dozen, Starke--an' you know it. What this dam' place needs is teachers--not preachers. These people around here ain't wicked--they're jest too damned ignorant to be wicked!"

"Wickedness and ignorance are often synonymous, Doctor," Professor Starke would say. "But the Master has told us: 'Seek ye first the kingdom of God'. And another one of His commandments, which seems to justify the preachers, is 'Go ye into all the world'."

"The trouble with you Baptists, Starke, is that you're jest too literal-minded," Dr. Boone would declare. "Because the Bible says, 'Ye are the salt of the earth', you figger you have to dump yourself into a Baptist salt-shaker--an' go sprinkle yourselves over a few million Chinese, or other heathens, ten thousand miles away. Why don't you do a little intelligent sprinklin' right here at home?"

"That," Professor Starke would state, "is the purpose to which Corinth is dedicated."

"Then, why don't you jest give the Lord a rest for a while--I reckon He'd appreciate it--an' study the processes o' His plan?" the doctor would shout. "Why don't you stop

screechin' Hell-fire long enough to realize that God works--an' always has worked!--through the normal an' natural processes of evolution?"

"I accept evolution--as growth, development," Professor Starke would state. "But I do not accept its scientific application--nor does the Church. And I feel, Doctor, that Christianity is infinitely more effective in saving the world than your theory that man evolved from monkeys."

"Monkeys!" Dr. Boone would snort. "Hell's bells! If you Baptists are so damned afraid of monkeys--why do you make monkeys outa yourselves?"

II

As a freshman at Corinth Jean found herself very much in the background. She was small for her age, and most of her classmates were young men and women. The Corinth girls, that is, were 'young ladies'. Professor Starke was wont to remind them of the fact almost every morning at chapel exercises. And the boys, of course, were 'young gentlemen'. Naturally, most of them were oblivious to fourteen-year-old Jean's very existence.

But Chet Bradley and Sam Baron were friendly to her; and Kate Young remained her closest friend. Kate, too, had provided her with a vicarious outlet for her romantic yearnings. The older girl was being 'sparked' ardently by one of the upper classmen--who actually lay in wait for her at class-room doors, in order to walk down the hall with her. Jean thought that it was very thrilling--blushed when she tried to imagine Sam Baron paying that much attention to her. But Sam had manifested no 'sparkin'' inclinations toward Jean.

The teacher-problem was always an acute one at Corinth. During her first year Jean's English class had five different instructors. Miss Fulsome, the first one, was called home at mid-term by the illness of her mother, and did not return. Her successor, Miss Willie Wadsworth, was heralded as a missionary from foreign fields.

But Miss Willie descended upon Boonville wearing an ultra-short skirt and peek-a-boo waist--inspiring from Corinth's 'young gentlemen' such comments as, "Hey--pipe the live-stock!" And like the harps which hung on the willows by the rivers of Babylon, Miss Willie was wont to sway....After less than two months of 'endeavor', she departed the town--by request.

As a teacher Miss Willie had been benevolently indifferent to her classes; but her successor, a Mrs. Gresham, was contemptuous of them. She was a hulk of a woman, with the general lines of a percheron mare. Her features resembled a chunk of broken concrete; her disposition was sulphuric. Corinth, her fellow teachers, the student-body, the town--she sneered at them openly. And she took pains to inform Corinth that her tenure there would be of short duration.

Jean fell under the woman's displeasure immediately. Mrs. Gresham glanced at her the day she took over the class and asked: "What are you doing here, pray? Do they expect me to teach a kindergarten?"

Jean was too astonished to answer.

"Well--are you dumb?" the woman snapped.

Kate Young said indignantly: "She's fourteen--an' she's the best student in the class!"

The woman turned on Kate: "I am speaking to this infant--prodigy--not you!" Then she glared at Jean: "Answer me!"

"What--what do you want--want me to say, Miss Fulsome?"

Jean stammered.

"I am not Miss Fulsome--or Miss Anybody!" the woman snarled. "I am Mrs. Gresham--and you will do well to remember it. Nor do I care to hear about Miss Fulsome--or the way she taught you. I shall teach you as I see fit. Whether you like it or not is a matter of utter indifference to me."

For several weeks she conducted her classes in that vein. Complaints began to come to Professor Starke about her; but the woman had excellent recommendations--had written several textbooks in English--and teachers who would accept the salaries offered by Corinth were hard to find. Professor Starke hoped that she might last to the end of the term, anyway.

Jean became the special target of the woman's sarcasm. "Now we shall see if our child-prodigy can recite," she would say. And the fact that Jean usually managed to answer the questions correctly drew forth sadistic sneers at the girl's precocity.

One day Jean stumbled on the spelling of 'whosoever', through sheer nervousness. She had known the correct spelling for years.

"Very well, Miss Taylor," Mrs. Gresham purred. "You may stay after school. One of your undoubted brilliance should be able to learn the word before six o'clock, I'm sure."

Jean hid her face on the desk, began to cry.

Sam Baron got up, Chet Bradley more slowly.

"Jean's done nothin' to stay in for--you ol' heifer!" Sam shouted. "An' she ain't goin' to stay!"

The woman's face contorted into a horror of venom. "Get out!" she screamed like a homicidal fish-wife. "Get out--both of you!"

Then her glance fell on Jean. "You--you low brat!" she hissed. "Get out! I hate the very sight of you!"

"Come on, Jean--you too, Kate," Chet said. "She's jest crazy."

They found Professor Starke unpacking second-hand books, in the basement of Main Hall. Sam poured out an excited account of what had happened; Kate and Chet verified it.

"Wait in my office," Professor Starke said. "I'll get Mrs. Gresham."

But Jean did not want to see the woman again. "Do I have to come?" she begged.

"Certainly not, my child," he told her gently. "Just wait in the library--and don't worry about it. I am sure no blame can be attached to you, whatever."

In his office Mrs. Gresham showed no emotion whatever. She gave her account of what had happened, played up the 'ol' heifer', said that Jean and the other three were in open revolt against her authority as a teacher--added that they were ignorant, lazy, and malicious.

"She's lyin'--every word of it!" Sam cried hotly.

"She is!" Kate assented. "She's jest fixin' things to suit herself--an' it's a pack o' lies!"

Mrs. Gresham lifted a gloved hand. "Well--I must say!"

Professor Starke looked at Chet.

"It's jest like Sam told you, sir," he said quietly.

"An' it's been goin' on since the first day she come."

Professor Starke sent the three students to wait with Jean. As he went with them to the door, he sighed deeply. The woman had influential connections; and his board of trustees could not be assembled--from all over the state--for several days....Did he dare dismiss her on his own authority? Could he do so? Mrs. Gresham had a contract....

He turned and met her contemptuous gaze. "I am asking you to resign, Mrs. Gresham," he said quietly, "for the good of the school, and for your own good as well. Your health, I fear, is not up to the rigors of teaching in Corinth."

"My health is excellent. You need not perjure yourself for an excuse," she said coldly. "I have a contract to teach here. If necessary, I shall carry this case to the courts."

The woman knew she held the ace of unfavorable publicity to Corinth--which drew students with its reputation of a 'wholesome Christian environment'. Professor Starke would never jeopardize that reputation by going to court with one of his faculty.

But he--who knew nothing of poker--had also achieved an ace. He felt that the idea had come to him as a divine inspiration. "You forget that you have laid yourself liable to criminal prosecution, madam," he said.

"How--may I ask?"

"In the presence of Chester Bradley, who is twenty-three years old--and an ex-soldier decorated for bravery in France--

you called the daughter of one of our leading citizens a 'low brat'," he stated. "The word 'low' may not be used with impunity in Boonville, Mrs. Gresham. I advise you to leave town before the girl's parents learn of the incident--or take the consequences."

The woman left Boonville that afternoon--before Mary and Judson learned what had happened. Some weeks later word came to Professor Starke that Mrs. Gresham had been committed to the state insane asylum at Morganton.

He took the English class himself until another teacher arrived--such a nonentity that the students named her 'Ol' Dishwater'. She trickled away at the end of the second semester, and did not trickle back. Perhaps she evaporated....

III

Jean missed the annual series of revival meetings held at Corinth that spring. While they were in progress, she was out of school with the measles. When she returned, she learned that several of her fellow students had 'got religion'--Chet Bradley among them.

Jean herself had never been 'converted', and Mary worried about her failure to achieve that indispensable prerequisite to salvation. If Jean should die 'unregenerated', Mary believed she would go to Hell--for Christ Himself had said: "Except a man be born of water and of the Spirit, he cannot enter the kingdom of God."

But being 'converted' was a painful mystery to Jean. They told her she must be 'born again'--that to do so, she must 'believe'. And she had never disbelieved....The feeling of

her 'lost-ness' hung over her--a black cloud from the very pit of Hell....It terrorized and bewildered her. And when she questioned Judson about it, he said: "I jest don't know, honey."

Mary, of course, iterated and reiterated the accepted cant of fundamentalism: Original Sin, a Lost World, Atonement--with all their ramifications of dogma. To her it was 'God 's just an' merciful judgment', never to be doubted or questioned. But to Jean--a living question-mark--it didn't make sense...

How could she 'believe'--and when she never had doubted? How could she 'accept Christ'--when she never had rejected Him? And so the impossibility of it--the absurdity of it--made her begin to doubt....

She also missed joining one of the girls' literary societies that year. "I jest ain't a-goin' to have you runnin' around after night to them meetin's," Mary had declared. But Jean could see no good reason why she was forbidden to join a society--when the other Corinth girls were permitted, and urged by Professor Starke, to do so.

Corinth had four so-called 'literary' societies--'brother-and-sister' organizations. The Corinthian boys shared a hall with their sister Clio; the Athenians and Delphians shared another. Actually, however, the four societies functioned as social fraternities and sororities, dividing the student-body into two factions, which vied with each other in trying to run the school.

Kate was a Delphian; Sam and Chet were Athenians. Jean, of course, wanted to be a Delphian too. She wanted it--even more than to be 'converted'....If she were 'converted', would Mary

trust her enough to let her join?

The girl realized that she was growing up. Even Mary had admitted the fact--by lengthening her dresses....And her legs, now, were beginning to 'look like something'. Boys stared at them. Sam Baron did--even Chet Bradley. And her breasts were beginning to fill out, as Kate's had done...

One day Kate told her: "You're gettin' a nice pair o' legg--with your little feet, Jean."

Jean blushed, pulled her skirt over knees that were no longer bony. Kate laughed. "You don't have to be ashamed of 'em, kid. They're good advertisin'."

Kate, who had blushed and pulled down her own skirt in the Free School, now considered her legs a social asset....

That year an ex-soldier tried to organize a band at Corinth. The attempt failed because the school could provide no instruments. But during the interim Sam Baron learned to play a saxophone. Choosing the 'sweet' rather than the 'hot' style of technique, he had bought a folio of light classics, with piano accompaniment. And he was anxious to display his virtuosity at a joint meeting of the Athenians and Delphians.

One afternoon as Jean was going home from school, he left a group of boys in front of the post office and walked up the street with her. It was the first time in her life that she had had an escort her own age, and the fact that the escort was Sam thrilled her beyond words. He, however, broke the conversational ice.

"How about bringin' my sax up some evenin', Jean--an' our havin' a blow-out?"

"I'd like to, awfully. But I'd have to ask Mamma," she

"Oh, sure," he agreed. "Well--you just ask 'er. An' I'll run up, an' we'll have us a time."

He told her about his plan to play for the Athenians and Delphians. "Maybe we could do it at our next meeting, about a month from now," he said. "It'll be a swell affair, Jean. Everybody dates up, an' we have a program an' eats. You'd have the time of your life."

"Goodness, I just hope Mamma will let me! I'd rather go than--almost anything in the world!"

"Heck, I want you to go. I mean--I want to date you for that night, Jean."

She blushed, looked down at the sidewalk. "If--if Mamma will let me..." she murmured.

But Mary already had seen them walking up the street together; at the door she met Jean, her finger menacing like a loaded and cocked pistol.

"I want to know--I jest want to know--what you mean by lettin' that good-for-nothin', cigarette-smokin' Sam Baron walk home with you, 'Genie Taylor!'"

"I--I didn't let him," Jean stammered. "He--just caught up with me."

"What did he have to say to you?"

"We--we just talked music, Mamma. He--he wanted me to ask you if he could bring his saxophone up some evening--"

Mary bristled. "I'd be a pretty lookin' mother--a mighty pretty lookin' mother--lettin' the likes o' him come to my house to see my child!"

"Oh--please let him come, Mamma!" Jean begged. "You an' Papa would be here. There couldn't be any harm in it!"

"There'd be harm--because harm 'ould come o' it," Mary stated. "You saw what your own-born cousin Trixie come to, runnin' around with the likes o' him. An' before I'd let you come to that--I'd see you dead an' buried, 'Genie Taylor!'"

The girl realized the utter futility of argument. She was heartsick, for she knew too that Mary would never consent to her going with Sam to the Athenian-Delphian party, or anywhere else. And Sam would ask some other girl--would lose whatever interest he had in her....Jean hated her mother then--and was afraid to hate her...The girl tried to drive the thought from her mind....

But next day, when she told Sam what Mary's reaction had been, he said: "Well--we can practice anyway. We can do it in the auditorium durin' noon hour."

Jean's face brightened. "Would Professor Starke mind?"

"I'll ask him," Sam promised. "I'll tell 'im what we're practicin' for."

"Mamma won't let me go to that, though."

"Well--there's no harm in practicin'. An' maybe somethin' will turn up--so you can go."

"But--you could get somebody else, Sam."

"I don't want anybody else."

Jean was silent for a few moments. "I'm glad--you don't," she murmured.

IV

Leaving the study hall a few minutes before noon, Jean hurried over to the court house. "What is it, honey? Did you want somethin'?" Judson asked.

She told him about the practice in the auditorium. He

know that Mary had refused to let Sam come to the house, had argued the matter with her--and, as usual, had lost. He knew too that there was nothing against Sam, other than an occasional cigarette.

"I don't like your havin' to do things behind Mary's back, honey," he said at last. "But...she's mighty unreasonable sometimes....Yes, if Starke says so, you go ahead an' practice. If Mary finds out, she can jest blame me."

Jean put her arms around his neck and kissed him.

The practices in the auditorium became daily affairs. Because she knew more music than he did. Sam wanted her to coach him. Jean did so--taught him phrasing and expression, made him count the time. But they were not without supervision--although neither was aware of it.

Professor Starke 'happened' in one day, sat down in the back of the auditorium and listened to them. "Well have you two play for chapel some morning," he told them. "I had no idea anybody could get music from one of those things, Sam."

"I didn't get much till she showed me how," the boy grinned.

A few days before the Athenian-Delphian party Sam achieved an idea--to invite Jean's parents. As the meetings were semi-public, such an invitation was in order. But Mary declared she would 'have no truck with such foolishness', and Judson went with Jean. Mary had to content herself with the prophecy that he would regret the day he did it.

Sam met them in front of Main hall, escorted them upstairs to the Athenian-Delphian sanctum with considerable formality. At the introduction of visitors which preceded the program,

he arose and said: "I am honored, Brother Athenians an' Sister Delphians, to have as my guests tonight Miss Jean Taylor and her father, Mr. Judson Taylor!"

Jean felt tremendously important--especially after Sam whispered: "You don't have to say nothin'. Your dad's doin' it."

Judson, indeed, having achieved the formal expression of thanks which the president's welcome indicated, continued to talk.

"I went to Corinth when I was a boy," he said. "That was right after the War between the States. An' the only buildin' left standin' was the ol' Chapel that used to be out there in the center o' that oval. The Yankees had saved it to stable their horses an' mules in. I reckon they jest figgered it wasn't worth burnin' down.

"At first there were about a dozen young fellers like me--we hadn't been old enough to git into the War--who should a-been goin' to the College. But--there jest wasn't any more college. The War stopped it; an' nobody had started it again.

"Then ene mornin' somebody climed up into the tower on the ol' Chapel an' started ringin' the bell. 'Most everybody turned out to see what it was ringin' for. But nobody seemed to know that, or who had rung it. Finally the women-folks started home to git dinner, an' it began to look as though we all might as well go.

"We young fellers wanted a chance to go to school. But everybody knew there was no money to repair that chapel, or to hire a teacher. Right after the War people were pretty busy jest tryin' to keep from starvin' to death....An' some argued that the College hadn't been any good in the first place.

"Finally a man got up on a stump--the Yankees had cut down the big oak for fire-wood--an' stood lookin' over the crowd. He didn't say nothin'--jest stood there lookin' at 'em. They began to yell at him, of course. Everybody knew him--he'd been with Lee at Gettysburg. Finally he spoke:

"I thought I heared a bell ringin' down here this mornin'," he said. "Thought maybe this ol' College wasn't dead after all."

"Then he stopped again--jest stood there lookin' at 'em. Nobody said a word. Then he went on: 'Reckon I made a mistake, though. I guess--that bell was jest an echo....

"'Maybe Boonville's dead too,' he went on. 'Maybe we're all dead....Maybe we're jest a-sittin' around waitin'.... Waitin' for them dam' Yankees to come back an' clean out their stable--so we can have a school!'

"Well--they weren't dead," Judson stated. "They cleaned out an' fixed up that ol' Chapel, folks. An' ol' Professor James--he's dead an' gone now--turned up an' started teachin'.

"Corinth's doors haven't been closed since then."

Judson had guaged his audience correctly. As he sat down Jean squeezed his arm; she was proud of him. When their turn came, she and Sam played "Herd Girl's Dream" and two more selections, were applauded vigorously. And after the program the Athenians and Delphians crowded around to express their appreciation for the entertainment. Several wanted to know when Jean was going to join the Delphians.

"Maybe she can next year," Judson temporized. "She's a little young yet--but we'll see about it."

Later, as Sam walked home with her--Judson went ahead because the sidewalk was not wide enough for three--Jean murmured: "It was just perfect, Sam! And--it was awfully nice of you to ask me."

"Nice--nothin'!" he denied. "I wanted to ask you. An' there'll be other parties--better than this one. We've just got to get you into those Delphians."

"Who was the man on the stump, Papa?" Jean questioned.

"That was your Uncle Sam Taylor, honey."

CHAPTER VII

I

Sam's father, John Baron, bought the Carter place which he had been renting, that summer. He started a dairy, the only one around Boonville; and Sam, who was used to farm work, complained that now he was only a dairy maid. He and Jean managed to see each other twice during the vacation, in spite of Mary. Judson connived with them by letting Jean go with him to his place on Gabriel's Creek in the buggy.

The meetings were casual enough. On both occasions Sam and his father were ditching the big meadow across the creek from Judson's farm. Mr. Baron came over to talk crops with Judson, and Sam--mud-splattered from head to foot--helped Jean across the creek, ostensibly to see the ditches.

But the meetings were not chance ones. Actually, they were trysts--tremendously significant, both to Jean and Sam. For they were 'corresponding' now. He mailed his letters to Kate Young, who brought them to Jean. And it was all in the best romantic tradition. Mary's opposition had fanned the flame

of Sam's interest in the girl; Jean's flame had needed no fanning....

When Jean started to the College again that fall, Mary insisted that she come home for lunch, instead of taking it with her as she had been doing. So the practices in the auditorium had to be abandoned. But Jean and Sam had three classes together, and there were six-minute periods between classes.

Sam was supposed to hurry home at four o'clock, to help look after the cows; and he drove a milk wagon of mornings, coming to school at the end of the first period. But occasionally he managed a half-hour after school; and Jean had to explain those stolen half-hours to Mary. The girl did the only thing she could--lied about them.

Kate Young did not go to Corinth that year. Her parents, fearing she might become too deeply involved with her ardent swain, bundled her off to a Baptist school in East Tennessee. Jean missed Kate; and as Mary would not let her join the Delphians, she made no other close friendships. At Corinth she was still an outsider.

The following spring she attended the annual revival meetings, which she had missed the year before because of the measles. The revivals were yearly climaxes of religious fervor at Corinth. They were held in the school auditorium--were a part of Baptist tradition. Services were conducted both mornings and evenings, classes being suspended in the mornings; and attendance by the entire student-body was 'expected'.

As a matter of fact, all school activities were practically at a stand-still for the duration of the meetings.

"Git us a man who ain't afraid to hit from the shoulder, Brother Ponder," Deacon Sellers would say. "What that College needs is a little ol'-fashioned Hell-fire."

And that meant a professional revivalist, a man whose salary depended on results. The sky was the limit to emotional appeal.

Jean dreaded the meetings. At Mary's behest, Reverend Ponder had reminded her that the revival would be a good time to 'git right with God'. Which meant that she was still 'lost'--with nothing to look forward to but Hell-fire...Maybe she was just 'predestined' to be lost...

The thought terrified her. She had seen a picture of Satan emerging from Hell, the flames licking around him; and she had watched flesh squirm and sizzle when thrown into the fire....The girl had come to dread Hell so much that she was afraid to watch the sun rise, for fear Gabriel would come with it--riding a cloud and blowing the Last Trump, sounding her irrevocable doom....

She had been to revivals--where fat old women got up and 'shouted', pounded sinner-relatives with their fists; where bearded deacons and wild-eyed sisters arose and gave soul-searing 'testimonials' as to how they had 'wrestled with the Lord' before they 'come through'....Why, she asked herself, did salvation have to be that way?

Why did people have to be 'saved'? Why had they been 'lost'--when they themselves had had nothing to do with it?

Why were innocent babies born into a 'lost' world? What did it all mean?

And Mary would say that she, Jean, was being 'stiffnecked' about it, that she was deliberately--maliciously--determined to refuse salvation! How could her mother love her--and think such a thing?

With the exception of Dr. Boone, all of Boonville and Corinth tried to attend every meeting of the revivals. Judson, however, because he had to keep his office open, alternated with his clerk on the day services. As Jean did not have to go to the College before the morning sessions, she and Mary attended them together.

At the auditorium door, before the first meeting, Jean stopped and shuddered. "Oh--do I have to go in there, Mamma?" she begged.

Mary's mouth set in its grim line of accusation. "His mercy is everlastin', my child," she said. "But them that turn away from the straight gate mock God Almighty. An' God will not be mocked!"

Jean sighed--followed her mother down the center aisle to a seat a few rows behind the mourner's bench. Mary sat stiffly upright, folded her hands--stared grimly at the pulpit.

The apostle of the revival was the Reverend Wesley Salisbury. His Christian name was a misnomer; he should have been a Methodist. He was a nervous little man, wore a Prince Albert coat, affected a smirk of cherubic benignity--as though he were conscious of being on the most intimate terms with the angels.

His voice was soft, sweet--wheedling. He came as 'an humble servant, bringing a message of great joy'. He was merely a vessel, molded by the Potter. Yes, merely a piece of humble clay--a crock, a jar, an earthenware jug--a man--fashioned from the dust of the earth, doomed to return to the dust whence he came....Earth to earth--dust to dust--ashes to ashes...

Then his voice rang out like the crack of a black-snake whip:

"Look at me! Weak, humble, ugly--human clay--Wesley Salisbury! Crock--jar--earthenware jug! But--filled with the water of life everlasting!

"The God that sent Moses and Joshua--Isaiah and Jeremiah--the Apostles--and Jesus Christ Himself!-- He has sent me to you this day, my friends! And I shall be strong!

"For His rod and staff shall support me--His Book of Books shall justify me! Yea, though I walk through the valley of the shadow of death--as I do walk, my friends--He is with me..

"In the stillness of the night a voice came unto me and whispered: 'Up, Wesley Salisbury! Pick up thy staff and gird thy loins! And where I send thee--go!'

"Since that night I have gone, my friends. And He has sent me here to you....!"

It was the Call--the direct authorization from God-- without which no revivalist would dare to lift his voice. Reverend Salisbury had presented his credentials....

For his 'warming-up' sermon he chose the topic "Creation"-- a fire-and-brimstone version of Satan's fall. Jean visualized every scene of it--shuddered at the licking flames--at the

gibbering, shrieking fiends of Satan's legions. Over and over the man repeated, "the eternal fires of Hell".

But the preacher made no call for mourners or converts that morning. He was 'sowing the seed', preparing the minds of his listeners. Jean sighed as she left the auditorium; it had become a place of horror.

That afternoon she asked Sam if he had attended the meeting.

"No, I went home," he grinned. "My ol' man's a Methodist, an' don't go in for that Hell-fire stuff. I was baptized when I was a kid, anyhow. So I don't need to get converted."

All her life Jean had heard that the efficacy of a Methodist 'sprinklin'' was no more than that of walking in the rain.

"But why don't you have to get converted?" she asked.

"Oh, when we're old enough, we just decide to join the Church--an' try to do the best we can," he told her. "That's all God wants us to do anyway. So what's the use in all that rantin' an' ravin' about it?"

Jean had been asking herself that question.

"But I have to go--and I just hate it!" she exclaimed.

"I wish you would, Sam. I--I'd feel better if you were there."

"Any chance o' gettin' to walk home with you?"

"Not unless something just happens so you can."

"Well--it might," he said. "I'll come tonight, anyway, Jean."

II

With Baptist dogma as the only standard of salvation she had ever known, Jean began to worry about the state of Sam's soul, as well as that of her own. If he had been baptized as an infant, too young to be 'convicted of sin', how could that fact relieve him of the necessity of being 'converted'? In a way she had 'sinned'--by disobeying Mary about Sam--she realized. But she could not 'repent' doing so. And her disobedience had been sanctioned by Judson....

That made her 'sin' a question of relative right and wrong, it seemed to the girl.... Surely God must be fair-minded and just enough to see that.... If He were not, she thought with a shudder, how could He expect people to love Him?

That night the preacher chose the topic, "Original Sin". Jean had hoped he would say something she could understand; but it was the patter of myth and dogma she had heard a hundred times, based on premises which were 'irrefutable truths'--God's 'revealed' word to man. It served only to horrify and bewilder Jean, for she was afraid to question it.

The Garden of Eden was the setting--an innocent paradise, with Adam and Eve scampering dutifully after the animals, which Adam thought he owned because he had named them. It was a sort of purposeless Biblical 'cowboys'. The very existence of Adam and Eve, it seemed to Jean, was as meaningless as that of the animals.

Then the snake entered--Satan in disguise, but fairly reeking with fire and brimstone. Eve was a Pandora of curiosity listening wide-eyed to the cunning promptings of the snake, whispering to stolid, ox-like Adam--pointing coyly to the apples

"It won't do us any harm just to taste one. Please, Adam--just one teeny-weeny bite!"

Then the two under the Tree of Knowledge--which meant that knowledge was sin--munching their apples...Eve's sudden realization: "Adam--merciful heavens! We haven't a stitch of clothes on!"

Satan--chuckling sardonically in the background....

Then, Jehovah, ~~walking~~ in the cool of the evening:
"Adam, where art thou?"

The two fig-leaf-clad culprits hiding guiltily, conscious of sin....Discovered--convicted--punished. Eve, with the curse of motherhood; Adam, with the 'sweat of thy face' dictum. Both banished from the Garden, by the angel with the flaming sword...

"And that, my friends," the preacher cried, "was man's first disobedience--Original Sin! You and I--all mankind--are the children of that disobedience! Eve-begotten, we are the penalties of it likewise--for we are all born of sin!"

"Is there any condemned sinner in this congregation tonight--is there any man or woman, boy or girl--who has questioned in his heart: 'Why am I lost?' or 'Why must I accept God's grace?'"

He paused dramatically, then continued softly: "Why beat about the bush--why make the road to Hell easier--why do Satan's work for him? With God's help--yes, with the help of Almighty God Himself--I shall tell the truth!"

Then he clinched his hands, shook his fists.

"To you--and you--and you!" he thundered. "If you have asked those questions--this is my answer: You are the fruit of sin, begotten of sin! Your home is Hell--your portion, its everlasting fires! As the sin--curses of man's first disobedience, have you any right to God's love? Have you any right to his Mercy? To a seat in Heaven with His Chosen?"

"No! a thousand times--no!" he hissed. "You are the enemies of God, born into the army of His arch-enemy, Satan! You, O miserable sinners--are the damned!"

His words became a hail of brimstone: "The mouth of Hell is gaping for you--the fiends incarnate dance and shriek in hellish glee at the thought of your coming! Satan himself, with all his arch-fiends around him, is waiting to welcome you to the fiery pits of Hell! You are his children--coming home! You, O sinners, are the fuel for the everlasting fires of Hell!"

A woman sprang up: "JED---you're lost! You're a-goin' to feed them fires o' Hell! Come to God--come to God--come to God!"

Grasping her cowering husband by the hair, she dragged him up the aisle to the mourner's bench--chanting a hysterical sing-song: "Come to God--come to God--come to God!"

Throughout the auditorium, now, people were moaning, sobbing, praying aloud. It was mass-hysteria, fear-induced. And the man in the pulpit knew that he 'had them'.

"Listen--there is a way!" he shouted. "Yes--vile, miserable sinners--trembling on the very brink of Hell--there is a way! God has sent me--has sent me here tonight--to point it out to you--the straight and narrow way--the only way!"

"Listen! God, in His everlasting mercy--in His divine compassion--suffered His Son to come into the world! He was begotten--not of sin!--but by the Holy Ghost, of the Virgin Mary; He lived and walked as a man--meanly, humbly--proclaiming His Father's message; He suffered the agonies, the humiliation--the Divine Passion--of a Roman Cross, as a blood-sacrifice for your sins.....

"And the Lamb of God hath said: 'Ye must be born again'!"

"And I, Wesley Salisbury--speaking as God's ordained messenger, sent here to bring you the tidings of His mercy--say unto you, O sinners: 'Ye must be born again'!"

But he did not tell them how.

He had built up an atmosphere of 'sin-consciousness'--a malignant, hysterical mental effluvium which permeated the auditorium like a fog, And Deacon Sellers, looking sanctimonious in the 'amen corner', realized that the preacher was smart enough to 'let 'em simmer a while'.

The choir began a subdued accompaniment of gospel hymns--"Almost Persuaded", "O Sinners, Come Home", "Are You Washed in the Blood of the Lamb?" And the preacher started his 'sales-talk' for mourners:

"Are you washed in the Blood of the Lamb, brother? Are you, my sister, yearning to break away from the clutches of Satan? Is there one--just one--who would get right with God tonight? Are there two--or ten, or a hundred--among you who would climb from the brink of everlasting Hell? Who would renounce the slippery, downward path of sin this night--who

would cling to the Cross of Salvation? If there is one, let him come forward to God's mercy-seat and beg His Grace!

"Is Satan crouching there beside you--men and women, boys and girls? Is he clutching you--telling you to wait--whispering for you to let somebody else go first? Can you not spurn him?

"Stand up, my brother--my sister--stand up! Take a step--just one step--toward salvation!

"Ah, there is a sister--God bless you! Step right up here--is there another? Yes--God bless you, little girl! And his blessing on you, brother--sit down, right there. Ah, young woman--may His infinite mercy comfort you! God bless you, young man--God bless you, my child! 'A little child shall lead them'--is there another?"

Through his auctioneer-patter, the words of the hymn kept pounding upon Jean's consciousness--"almost persuaded--almost persuaded--almost persuaded"....She ceased to hear the preacher's harangue, forgot Mary's grim presence beside her...

"'Almost' is but to fail;

'Almost' will not avail!

Sad, sad, that bitter wail--

'Almost--but lost!'"

"'Almost--but lost!'"

Jean could endure no more of it. Sobbing hysterically, she pushed past Mary and Judson to the aisle and hurried from the auditorium.

III

As she pushed through the crowd at the door--the overflow from the congregation--Sam took her arm.

"You goin' home, Jean?"

"Yes--I just can't stand it!"

He guided her to the street. "Let's cut across by the dorm," he said. "It's--we won't meet anybody."

They passed the boys' dormitory, took the path up through the Connors' pasture. Jean was still sobbing; Sam put his arm around her.

"Don't cry," he said. "It ain't worth it. I heard that--that maniac in there. If God's the kind o' god he preaches-- I'll take the Devil!"

Jean dabbed at her eyes with her handkerchief. "It was-- just terrible..."

They came to the stile across the Connors' fence.

"Here's a place we can sit down," he said. "You're tremblin' like a leaf, Jean."

They sat on the bottom step; Jean clung to his fingers gratefully, comforted by his nearness.

"Look here--you're my girl," he said gruffly. "We've never had a chance to talk about it--but you are."

She murmured: "Yes--I am."

"Then--jest forget about that damned spellbinder, an' think about me, Jean. I'm crazy about you, an' you know it."

"I do think about you, almost all the time."

"Then, why can't we see each other, like human bein's? you'd think I had leprosy or somethin'."

"I wish we could...But you know how Mamma is, Sam."

"Why couldn't we anyway?"

"We could--sneak an' do it, I guess."

"Well--let's sneak an' do it! I can get the key to the Athenian hall, an' we can slip up there."

"I'd rather go for a walk or something, though. Then we wouldn't get into trouble at school."

"All right--when?"

"As soon as we get a chance," she said. "But I'll have to be getting home now, Sam. They'll be there in a few minutes."

"They'll be comin' up the sidewalk though," he reminded her. "But we can go on, an' wait in the yard."

They waited under the walnut tree. Sam put his arms around her awkwardly, then held her close. Jean raised her lips for their first experimental kiss. And by doing so she defied damnation--for Mary had told her that 'huggin' an' kissin'' were the Devil's own snares....

"They're comin' up the street," he muttered presently. Then he kissed her again. "Good night--sweetheart," he murmured.

"Good night, Sam..."

But they clung together, their lips pressed, until Judson and Mary reached the yard steps. Then Jean ran around the house with him, paused for another kiss at the back door, and hurried through the kitchen to the dining room.

As she fumbled for a match to light a lamp, Mary said: "Yes, she's here."

Judson called: "Are you all right, 'Genie?'"

"Yes, Papa," she said, as she lighted the lamp.

Mary demanded: "Why did you git up an' leave God's house, 'Genie Taylor?"

Judson said sharply: "Never mind, Mary--she's heard enough o' that for tonight."

Mary sat down, a picture of indignation, and Judson went on: "I don't think much o' that feller's preachin'. If you don't want to go to them meetin's, 'Genie, you needn't."

Mary arose, hands on hips: "Do you mean to stand there--in your own house an' home--an' say that child don't have to do nothin' about savin' her immortal soul?"

"I ~~mean~~--jest what I said."

Mary shook her finger athim: "You've been a stumblin' block to her salvation--since she was born, Jud Taylor!" she cried. "But--her sins are on my head--not yourn!"

"Do you believe what that man said,?"

"I don't believe--I know! She was begotten in sin--an' she's one o' the damned! An' you'll keep me from doin' my duty by her--over my dead body!"

Jean began to sob. "I'll go, Mamma. I'll-do anything you want me to do!"

Judson put his arm around her. "Don't cry, honey. Mary didn't mean--"

"I did mean it!" Mary declared. "I meant it--for it's God's own word."

Jean cried: "Mamma--how could my sins be on your head?"

Stiff as a ramrod, Mary looked at her--and sniffed.

"Eve was a woman," she stated. "I reckon I'm one too."

"But I still don't see--"

"You don't want to see, but--" Mary hesitated. "Eve sinned, an' Cain, the murderer, was God's punishment on her. You--an' your stiffnecked wickedness--are mine."

"Do you--hate me, Mamma?"

"I hate sin. I've hated my own--an' I hate yourn. But I pray--yes, on my bended knees--that you'll accept God's love an' mercy!"

Jean caught a glimmer of light. "If I do--If I can be converted--will that mean He has forgiven your sins too?"

"It'll be a sign an' a toke--of His mercy to you an' me, 'Genie Taylor."

But it was too much for the girl to rationalize alone, and Judson could not help her. After her father and mother had gone to bed, Jean climbed out through her window and went to Dr. Boone's office. When she tapped on the door, he grunted, "Come in--dam' it!"

Although it was past midnight, he was sitting with his feet propped on his desk, smoking his pipe. "Hello, honey," he greeted her. "Come in. Didn't mean to swear at ye."

Jean noticed that he did not ask what was wrong.

"Why don't you ever go to church, Doctor?" she questioned abruptly. His answer surprised her.

"Huh! I do--went last Easter, in Asheville," he chuckled. "An' the roof didn't fall either. Reckon I'll go here one o' these days, jest to shock this dam' town. How's the revival down there at that so-called College?"

"It's--that's what I came to see you about."

"Sort o' figgered that out myself. Are they a-rantin' an' a-ravin' as usual down there?"

"Yes."

"An' you're a-wonderin' what it all means?"

"Yes, I am, Doctor. It just doesn't--mean anything."

"I reckon it does, when you come to understand it," he said thoughtfully. "It means a bunch o' people--some o' 'em hypocrites, some fanatics, an' some honestly ignorant like Josh Ponder an' Cal Starke an' your ma--tryin' to tie God, the universe, an' humanity up into a neat little package o' Baptist dogma."

"What is religion, Doctor?"

"It's the answers people work out, or take second-hand, about God an' the Universe, I reckon," he said. "There have been thousands of explanations--thousands of religions. The Hebrews worked out a set o' answers, an' the Christians took it over--hooked Christ onto it. The Hebrews done a pretty good job too, for that day. But the Christians have never had git-up enough to hook Christ onto what Science has found out and proved since."

"That's why you're still hearin' all that Hell-fire an' damnation, Original Sin an' Atonement. I jest wouldn't worry my head about it."

"But are the churches all wrong?" she asked. "Why are they so--so set an' sure about everything? Why is Mamma that way?"

"People don't like to think, honey--they jest naturally don't like to. So they need the churches, I reckon. As I said, they need to have their ideas wrapped up in a Baptist, Methodist or some other kind of package. Ol' fashioned ideas stay in the package, an' sometimes bad ones git into it. But the people

won't let it be tampered with, for fear the ideas'll git scattered an' they'll lose 'em.

"An' people don't like to change their minds; so they jest say God made it the way they want it to be--an' that insures 'em against havin'to change their minds. Mary's that way. That woman 'ould jest rather stick 'er hand into the fire an' burn it off than to change 'er mind."

"Didn't Christ die to save a lost world?"

"Well--that's jest a way of speekin', honey," he said. "Christ was tryin' to help an ignorant world--that had never been any smarter. You can't git lost unless you've been on the road, I reckon."

"But how can I accept Christ--'believe' in Him, an' be 'converted'--when I've been believing in Him all my life?" she asked. "The only things that have made me doubt Him--ever--have been what they've said in the church. That preacher--almost makes me hate God, instead of loving Him!"

"Bein' converted--acceptin' Christ--bein' born again--all them dogmas are jest a parto' the Baptist package, "Genie," he told her. "I used to be pretty bitter about religion--but people jest have to believe somethin'. An' I reckon most of 'em do the best they can....Mary does--she's honest in the things she believes. She's got a good mind too, but she's never learned how to use it, or anything but Baptist doma to think with...."

"Mary--she's jest the way she is, honey."

"Mamma wants me to join the church," Jean told him.

"Would it be right for me to? Would I be a hypocrite?"

"I reckon you'll have to decide that," he said. "That church down there--it's mighty narrow an' bigoted. But it stands for the best way o' livin' in this community....An' some folks--they jest have to have somethin' like Hell-fire to make 'em behave..."

He stopped and relighted his pipe. "It ain't so simple, when you git to thinkin' about it, 'Genie," he went on. "The teachin's of Christ--when the preachers git around to preachin' 'em--help folks live better....They've been a-doin' that for almost two thousand years, so you shouldn't have much trouble acceptin' Christ, I reckon."

"I haven't been 'converted' though. And I--I just have to tell Mamma that I have been. Anyway, they wouldn't let me join the church without bein' converted, Doctor."

"Maybe you have been--an' don't know it," he smiled. "It means 'changed'--an' you ain't afraid o' God any more, are you?"

"No, I believe He's fair an' just--He just has to be!"

"Well, you stick by that--as hard as Mary sticks to her Baptist dogma--an' you've had a better conversion than you'll git on any mourner's bench," he assured her. "You go an' talk to Josh Ponder about it tomorrow, honey. Tell 'im you want to join the church."

"Shall I tell him I've been--'convicted of ignorance'?"

The doctor chuckled: "No, I reckon that 'ould be tamperin' with Josh's private package, honey."

IV

Jean did not sleep much that night. Her mind refused to quit working. The meaningless jig-saw of religion had assumed a pattern, at last; she could think about it now without shuddering; and the realization loosed her Christian's burden of fear and bewilderment....God was just--He would not trick, cheat, or punish her maliciously....And Christ had said: "God is love".

She loved Sam, and he had said fervently that he was 'crazy about her'....

She remembered the sweet ecstasy of the kisses under the walnut tree....They had been stolen kisses; Mary would have condemned them. But the girl felt they were right....How could they be wrong--when He had said: "God is love"?

When she came into the dining room next morning, she said quietly: "I want to go to church early, Mamma. I want to see Reverend Ponder."

Mary set down the coffee pot, looked at the girl; Judson glanced up from the paper he had not been reading.

"Mary asked: "Have you made your peace with God, my child?"

Jean said earnestly: "Yes, Mamma, I think I have."

Mary stood looking at her, trying to read her mind. "I hope you have--I hope an' pray you have. But you want to be sure--mighty sure."

Jean could see the tears in her mother's eyes--realized it meant that much to her....

Mary questioned: "Did you call on Him? Did you ask His blessin'?"

Jean had done that every night of her life, since she was

old enough to lisp the words. She said: "Yes, Mamma--Yes, I did."

"Thanks be to God!" Mary exclaimed. "He'll hear you, 'Genie--He'll hear your prayers--an' He'll hear mine! Thanks be to God!"

With her apron to her eyes, she hurried to the kitchen.

Jean was filled with heartache for her, with remorse for her inability to understand Mary. She went to the kitchen and put her arms around her. "I'm goin' to try to be different, Mamma," she promised. "I'm goin' to try--my very best!"

Mary dried her eyes. "God'll help you," she said. "You bring in them biscuits, 'Genie--before they git cold."

Jean considered her promise to her mother sacred, and resolved to keep it to the best of her ability. But the promise had not included Sam. Mary, she felt, had no right to forbid her seeing him and talking to him. The girl's conscience, however, would not let her consent to go walking with him clandestinely--unless there was no other way. She must make Mary realize that he was not a villain, but merely a 'nice boy'.

As she sat with Mary before the morning service, Reverend Ponder slipped into the seat they had left for Judson. "Have you decided to put your trust in the Lord, 'Genie?" he asked.

The question would have terrified her the day before. She said: "Yes, Mr. Ponder, I have."

The preacher smiled, patted her hand. He had known Jean since she was an infant. "If you've done that, nothin' else matters," he said--and added: "Don't let--other things worry you, 'Genie."

She knew he meant the revivalist. "Shall I go up to the mourners' bench?" she asked.

"Not unless you want to. Just remember that Jesus does the savin'--because we accept Him in our hearts."

Jean was glad. She had dreaded the mourners' bench.

When the revivalist took his place in the pulpit, she was surprised to see that he was no longer the menacing, accusing personification of damnation he had seemed the night before--but merely the pompous, slightly ridiculous little man he had been at the beginning of the revival. Freed from the menace of his eternal dictums, she watched him with a new interest.

The pattern of his sermons had led him to "Atonement"; and that day he chose as his personal role, "Bearer of Good Tidings". Having settled the questions of Original Sin and Damnation, seemingly for all time to come, Reverend Salisbury made no mention of them whatever. Today his was the 'message of great joy' which he had promised in his first sermon. Again he was merely 'an humble vessel', 'clay--shaped by the Potter'.

Jean listened to his introduction, couched again in the sugared words and tones of unconvincing humility, with a feeling of distaste. But when he started the third episode of his story--which, like the other two, she had heard a hundred times before--she forgot the man, forgot even that the story was being filtered through his mind...

She saw bearded Joseph, weary and foot-sore, trudging into Bethlehem--leading the shaggy little donkey which bore the expectant mother--saw the sleepy little country town,

now awake and cringing at the measured tread of Roman soldiers, come to demand Caesar's taxes--saw Joseph and the girl on the donkey shrink away from the lewd jibes of swaggering centurians, hurry furtively along darkened streets in a vain search for an inn...

Once again the little man in the pulpit wove his spell of words--and lost himself completely in the warp and woof of it. Jean too was lost in it; everybody in the auditorium was. The girl forgot everything except the pictures thrown on the screen of her consciousness....

Finally the Crucifixion--ghastly, agonizing, soul-searing; with its leering, taunting priests; its brutal, jeering soldiers--dicing for His robes--piercing His side; and "Father, forgive them..." The stricken, dazed, terrified group at the foot of the cross; the thieves--"Save thyself and us", and "Lord, remember me when Thou comest..." And the final mortal agony--"My God, why hast Thou forsaken Me?"

At the end of it Jean was crying. So were Judson and Mary--and the man in the pulpit. He clinched the story with one sentence: "That, my friends, was the blood-atonement of Jesus Christ, the Son of God, for the sins of the world!"

Then, motioning for Reverend Ponder to lead them in prayer, Reverend Salisbury sank to his knees behind the pulpit, buried his face in his hands.

But Boonville's pastor did not lead them in prayer. The revivalist struggled to his feet. He stood for a moment like a blown-out candle. Then he sank to the floor in a pathetic little huddle.

Reverend Ponder bent over the man, tried to lift him. A woman screamed; another shrieked: "He's dropped dead!" The revivalist's features, now visible to the congregation, were contorting in horrible grimaces, his hands clutching wildly. Professor Starke and one or two others sprang to the stage and helped Reverend Ponder carry him to a dressing room.

The entire congregation was in an uproar. Women and children were shrieking; men were shouting: "Pour water on 'im!" "Git a doctor!" "Give 'im air!"

Deacon Sellers forced his way to the stage and began yelling and gesticulating for everybody to sit down. Nobody did so. Then Professor Starke came from the dressing room. He lifted his hand for silence.

"Brother Salisbury has been stricken with what seems to be a heart-attack," he said quietly. "Dr. Boone will be here in a few minutes. In the meantime, let us humbly ask God's blessing on our stricken leader."

When he had finished a brief petition, he said: "I think we should all go home now. Brother Salisbury is receiving every possible attention, I assure you. Reverend Ponder has asked me to announce that the evening service will be held at the usual time."

CHAPTER VIII

I

Before Jean left for the College that afternoon, Dr. Boone came to bring them news of the preacher. Mary made the doctor sit down and eat his dinner, which he had forgotten to do.

"Is that feller as good a preacher as they say he is, Jud?" he asked. "I figger maybe you ain't prejudiced."

"I never heard a sermon that could touch the one he preached today, Doc."

"Hum--did you hear 'im last night?"

"Yes, he talked on 'Original Sin'. I reckon you can figger what he said."

"Milton an' Bunyan, with Jonathan Ed'ards flavorin' 'em. Well--that feller's mighty sick. An' he says he's a-goin' to preach again tonight. Reckon he'll have a good congregation, anyway."

Judson asked: "Can he do it, Doc?"

"He's been riskin' his life every time he stepped into a pulpit, for the past three year'. Flesh an' blood'll stand only so much, Jud."

"If God's told that man to preach tonight, he'll preach--you mark my words!" Mary declared. "It won't hurt 'im, John Boone--and it'll be a miracle."

"Yes, it will, Mary."

"Well--why don't you go an' see it for yourself? It jest might do you a little good."

"I kinda figger on goin'," the doctor said dryly. "I've always wanted to see a miracle, Mary."

That afternoon the incident was discussed in each of Jean's classes, but no mention was made of the preacher's sermons. They were as completely forgotten, it seemed, as the emotions they had aroused. All of Boonville, Corinth, and the surrounding country crowded into the auditorium that

night. Professor Starke had the partition walls of the art and elocution rooms folded back, making the two wings available for the overflow crowd.

Dr. Boone came, and sat with the Taylors.

"This crowd didn't come to hear no sermon, Jud," the doctor said laconically.

Jean could feel the undercurrent of excitement. The auditorium no longer seemed a church; its atmosphere was that of the court house during a murder trial. Tonight there was a buzz of whispering.

The preacher was pale, Jean noticed; otherwise he seemed much as he had been before the heart attack. Tonight he preached on "Salvation", from the text, "For God so loved the world...."

Obviously he had meant the sermon to be a climax to the previous ones. It was--a masterly summary of the plan of Salvation and an exposition of Divine Love.

"Ol' Jonathan Ed'ards, Jud," Dr. Boone whispered. "But the feller can preach--Ed'ards or no Ed'ards."

Reverend Salisbury, however, was talking to a congregation already gripped in strong emotion--morbid curiosity. And the longer he preached, the more his sermon became an anti-climax. He wasn't even going to collapse again.

The whispering started before the prayer following the sermon had ended--became a buzz at the prayer's conclusion. The revivalist's call for mourners brought only a scant half-dozen to the bench. Among them was an annual 'repeater' who was 'not jest right in the head'. Somebody giggled as he

slouched up the aisle.

Reverend Salisbury only seemed not conscious that the meeting was a failure. After the benediction Jean saw him talking earnestly to the 'repeater'. And the girl realized that she had come to respect the man. There was something about him bigger than himself....Jean sensed it, but could not understand it.

"Well," Dr. Boone said at the post office corner, "I've seen my miracle, Mary. But them folks in that congregation were plumb disappointed. An' maybe he'll preach again--maybe he will.

"Mary said: "If God wants 'im to, John Boone, he will."

But next morning at breakfast she said: "There's the school bell, 'Genie. That clock's slow again."

Judson said: "The bell's tollin', Mary. I reckon he's dead."

Word came up the street that the revivalist had died during the night. The meetings were discontinued, but the following Sunday twenty-nine claimed to have 'seen the light' under the preaching. Jean joined the church with them and was baptized.

Considerably to her surprise, Sam did so too. "My folks are goin' to join," he told her. "We're Methodist, but we're goin' to live here. An' it won't hurt us to get dunked, I reckon."

Jean said: "I'm awfully glad, Sam. Now, maybe Mamma will see that you aren't a heathen."

II

Kate Young's erstwhile suitor married another girl that summer, and the following September her parents let her start to Corinth again. She and Jean were juniors. As Mary did not object to her going places with Kate, Jean hoped that her mother might let her join the Delphians that year. Until she did join a society, the girl realized, she would remain outside the student life at Corinth.

One day in front of Main Hall she joined a group, Kate among them, who were discussing the annual Corinthian-Athenian debate. One of the girls, Winifred Smith, looked at Jean coldly.

"We don't need your precious presence here, Miss Taylor," she said haughtily. "Since you belong to neither of the societies, our discussion is none of your business."

Jean was surprised and hurt. "I--I'm sorry," she stammered. "I didn't mean to intrude. I was just stoppin' for Kate."

"You weren't intrudin'!" Kate flashed. "You've got as much right here as she has--the nasty cat!"

One of the boys chided: "Girls--girls!"

"I consider myself too much of a lady to answer that," Winifred sneered. "But I must say, I don't like present company."

With a toss of her head she marched into Main Hall. Jean turned away to hide her flush of humiliation. Kate said: "Wait a minute, Jean."

Then she told the others: "In case you folks don't know it, Jean here has been asked to play a piano solo at the annual debate--and Winifred hasn't. So she's just showin' some of that

wonderful Christian spirit she talks about in chapel exercises!"

The irony referred to Winifred's proclaimed ambition to be a foreign missionary. She was one of the 'shining lights' at Corinth--led prayer meetings, taught a Sunday School class, and had even conducted a chapel exercise.

"But it can't be that--I haven't been asked to play for the debate," Jean said. "Anyway, why did she have to be so nasty about it?"

Kate said: "You're goin' to be asked--an' she's just a cat. Think nothin' of it."

Later she explained: "Sam's on the team, an' he suggested you. The Corinthians wanted Winifred--she's a Clio. But they got voted down, because the debate chairman's an Athenian this year, an' that gives 'em a majority."

She went home with Jean after school and told Mary about the incident.

"Smith!" Mary sniffed. "Jest which one o' the Smiths does she think she is, I'd like to know? For a cent I'd go down to that college an' give 'er a piece o' my mind!"

Mary searched her mental genealogies for a possible jail-bird--if not worse--in Winifred's ancestry.

"An' she said Jean don't even belong to one of the societies, Mrs. Taylor," Kate added craftily. "You ought to let Jean join the Delphians--jest to spite 'er."

"Well--she can!" Mary declared. "I'll not have that Smith-piece a-throwin' that up to 'er. 'Genie, you go right down there tomorrow an' tell them Delphians you'll join 'em."

So Jean finally became a Delphian--thanks to Winifred. And she learned that the Delphians were much more than a literary society. They, with the three other groups, were the focal centers of a clandestine social life which Professor Starke never dreamed of. And they were headquarters for undercurrent school politics, as well. As faculty members did not attend the weekly meetings except by invitation, the discussions which took place inside the society halls reflected the real attitudes of the student body. And many of the sub rosa sessions would have shocked Corinth's president and his faculty acutely.

Two of the school regulations most obnoxious to the students were compulsory attendance at chapel exercises--which, obviously, they could do nothing about in a Baptist 'college'--and the 'Chain Gang'. The latter innovation was the dean of women's plan to control social intercourse between young men and young women on Sunday afternoons.

That any two should go alone for a walk was unthinkable, of course. But couples were permitted to stroll around the campus--if they did not stroll too long, or too frequently. And any Jack might walk with his Jill in the Chain Gang.

He might, that is, if he had the courage to ask her--and to endure the jibes of the non-walkers. The Chain Gang was a column of twos, regulation orphan-asylum formation, with faculty members in front and behind--to see that no couples held hands. Its itinerary usually was along the public road to Cussin' Knob, or in the opposite direction, to Locust Grove. Even the 'goody-goodies' condemned it as a reflection on their moral integrity.

Behind their closed doors the four societies discussed such matters frankly and heatedly. Even the ministerial students and the 'goody-goodies', although frequently shocked by the discussions, kept their mouths shut about them. For the taboo on tattling was rigid.

As Jean and Kate lived at home, however, the Chain Gang rule did not apply to them; and neither was especially exercised about it. Kate went walking with her many and frequently changing beaux when she chose to do so; Jean and Sam would have endured the Chain Gang even, to be together on Sunday afternoons. But Mary still 'set her foot down'.

Since his joining the church Mary's attitude toward Sam had softened a little, however. She and Judson attended the annual debate--which Jean played for--and Sam won it for the Athenians, almost single-handed. Jean was tremendously proud of him; both Judson and Mary were impressed with his speech.

"He done right well," Mary admitted. "Maybe he's goin' to amount to somethin'. He might even make a preacher."

"Same, however, planned to 'make' a lawyer.

III

Now that she had contacted the real current of Corinth's student life, Jean realized that all but a few--the 'goody-goodies'--broke the school's rules without qualms of conscience. Boys stole down to the furnace room of their dormitory after 'lights out', to play cards and smoke cigarettes; they boasted too of 'wild parties' in isolated cabins or shacks a few miles from town--where they cooked and ate stolen chickens, drank cider, and topped the feast with pilfered watermelons. To the

girls they made much ado about the occasional indignant farmer who chased them--and sometimes peppered them with buckshot.

Now and then somebody would lose a hat or a cap in the chase, and the farmer would bring it to Professor Starke to be identified. But nearly always the article would belong to a ministerial student or a 'he-goody-goody'--who would maintain indignantly that it had been stolen!

Boys and girls met secretly in music rooms, in the society halls--wherever they could--and danced; couples stole out after dark to the baseball ground or the tennis courts and 'spooned'--'petting', 'necking', and 'lallygagging' not yet having been introduced to Corinth. 'Dark sparkin'' was a mysterious activity always mentioned with a significant emphasis...

But the ones who did those things were merely average students, Jean learned. There was a group much more depraved. Some of the boys boasted openly of going to Asheville and 'havin' 'em a time'--including wine, women, and song. A few of the wilder girls smoked cigarettes stealthily--even drank whiskey, if it was offered them. And there were at least three depraved ones who were known to be 'downright chippies'!

On every hand Jean saw her priggish standards of absolute morality flouted secretly--while they were justified, extolled, and glorified every morning in chapel exercises. Needing a working perspective at least, she questioned Dr. Boone about it.

He said: "You can dam up a river, 'Genie--but you jest can't stop it. It cuts a new channel, or backs up an' pours over the top o' the dam. Cal Starke's a good man, I reckon--but you jest can't dam up human nature."

"Even the young preachers sneak out with the girls."

"Sure--there ain't nothin' in the Bible agin it," he chuckled. "They've jest swum to the top, 'Genie--an' are a-pourin' over the dam."

But Jean was glad that she and Sam had not poured over the dam. Mary finally had agreed that she could go with him to the last joint-meeting of the Athenians and Delphians to be held that spring.

She said: "You're almost seventeen now, 'Genie. An' I reckon I've taught you have to behave yourself. See that you do."

Jean had been dreaming for years of a public date with Sam; she was too thrilled and excited to notice the grim warning.

The affair was to be a basket supper; but Sam and Clay Bryant, who was taking Kate, hinted mysteriously of a surprise the Athenians were planning. Kate and Jean were 'simply bursting' with curiosity as to its nature. As Sam had to work late and Clay stayed at the boys' dorm, the girls agreed to meet them in front of Main Hall.

Judson took Jean and Kate down there in the buggy, out of consideration to their formal dresses. It was Jean's first one; Mary had got it in Asheville, for the Athenian-Corinthian debate. And it already had passed the test of Sam's and Kate's approval. He and Clay had promised to wear tuxedos--if they could get them.

Corinth offered few occasions for formal attire. Dinner jackets and dress suits were rarities, and only a few of the girls had evening dresses. But the brother-and-sister

societies liked to 'put on the dog' when they could; every Delphian who could beg, borrow, or steal a formal that night would do so.

When Jean and Kate reached Main Hall, groups of boys and girls were beginning to issue from the two dormitories at opposite sides of the oval. Both groups strolled around it, met, and merged--with much laughter and giggles--into a procession of couples.

"They look just like the animals goin' into the ark," Kate laughed. But there were still several 'animals' who had not paired off.

One of the Athenians, Tom Willis, left his partner and waltzed out into the oval. "I've just elected myself unanimously as president of this here Chain Gang, folks!" he announced.

Then he proceeded to pair off the backward ones--chasing two seemingly reluctant swains and bringing them back to the damsels he had chosen for them.

"Now, brethern an' sistern," he shouted, "what hath been j'ined together--in peal servitude--let no man put asunder! We shall proceed with courage an' fortitude, dearly beloved. Sister Morgan will not lead us in the first twenty-nine verses of the 'Prisoner's Song'!"

Bee Morgan started the song and the rest joined lustily.

"Lock-step--this way!" Tom shouted. "An' keep step--you convicts!"

He pranced along beside the procession, then ran to rejoin Bee--was greeted with a burst of hoots and jeers. A belated Athenian from the dorm had stolen her. As Tom chased

interloper around the library building, Professor Starke emerged from his office in the girls' dormitory.

The merriment stopped--like water from a turned-off faucet.

Tom appeared around the corner of the library building, saw Professor Starke--sat down on a memorial stone and began twiddling his thumbs. Jean and Kate strolled toward the oval to see what was happening. Corinthian and Clio heads began to appear in the dorm windows.

"Damn!" Kate muttered. "It's all off now, I guess."

The porch-roof of the girls' dorm was becoming a grandstand; boys were running toward the oval from the other dormitory. Professor Starke walked to the flagpole in the center of the oval--stood grimly, accusingly for a few moments. Then he said:

"It grieves me to speak to young men and women in this way. But it is my duty to do so. Your conduct is unseemly, boisterous--actually sacrilegious. It is not in keeping with the dignity of this institution; it is not the conduct of Christian young men and women.

"I should be justified in forbidding your meeting tonight," he stated. "But I shall not do so. The reproaches of those who love the good name of Corinth--the promptings of your own consciences--shall be your punishment. But I am deeply disappointed in you, as individuals and as society groups. I trust that in the future you will remember you are Christian young men and women--not hoodlums!"

IV

Sam and Clay arrived while he spoke. Kate told them what had happened. Professor Starke had returned to his office; the culprits around the oval were talking, many of them loudly and indignantly. A Corinthian, at a safe distance, guffawed--then brayed like a jackass. Others in front of the boys' dorm began to hoot and jeer. Several Athenians started toward them, fists clinched, muttering.

Sam ran out into the oval. "Upstairs--everybody upstairs!" he shouted. "We've got a party for tonight--an' we're goin' to put it on! Everybody--upstairs!"

Others took up the cry, and presently all but the pugnacious ones had crowded through the doors of Main Hall. Sam and Chet Bradley induced the others--by collaring the two noisiest ones. Leaving Chet to guard the door, Sam hurried up to the Athenian hall--took his place at the secretary's desk as Clay Bryant, the president, rapped for order.

Bee Morgan, the Delphian president, got up. She was one of the few girls who had come to Corinth with a broad background of culture and refinement. She had brought, too, a perspective of the outside world.

"I imagine we all feel pretty much the same about this thing," she said quietly. "I, for one, feel pretty humiliated. What we were doing out there was harmless--an attempt to get a little enjoyment out of a ridiculous, childish rule. The Chain Gan, I feel, is an insult to my parents, a reflection on my bringing up--and an insinuation that I am too loose morally to go walking with a young man, without having a snooping old maid to watch me!"

"But Mr. President, we are wasting our time by nursing hurt feelings. Our self-respect as individuals demands that we do something about it; and if we don't--the Corinthians and Clios will laugh us off the campus!"

Marshall Joyner, a ministerial student, sprang up shouting: "Mr. President--Mr. President!"

Bee had not finished speaking; Clay pounded his gavel, but Marshall already was half-way to the platform. Bee made a little grimace, sat down.

Obviously, Marshall was greatly exercised. He rubbed his hands feverishly, clutched them in front of his stomach. He said: "I beg of you, Brother an' Sister Athenians--er--brothers an' sisters, do not take any hasty action in this matter! I was out there--I assume my own guilt--I humbly confess it! But I cannot sit here tonight without lifting my voice in defense of that saintly man whose life is a shinin' beacon--a livin' example--er--an inspiration, to every one who tries to follow the footsteps of Jesus Christ!"

"Let us be humble--let us be fair-minded--let us accept our blame, like Christian young men an' women!"

Clay recognized Tiny Brown, a petite blonde, who lisped:

"I think it 'h juth dithguthtin'--the way he talked to uth!" she declared vehemently. "I juth don't agree with a thing Marthall thaïd! If profethor Thtarke ith the Chritht-like--why can't he let uth have a little fun, like they do everywhere elthe?"

"I think it 'h juth dithguthtin'!"

Finally Sam got up. He said: "Well, folks, we're gettin' exactly nowhere. Why not ask Professor Starke up here--an'

just put it up to him?"

Chet Bradley--he had left the door to a janitor--rumbled from the back of the room: "Bring him up--an' let me talk to 'im!"

It seemed the only thing to do. Bee Morgan went to get him; a few minutes later Professor Starke returned with her and sat down in the front row of seats. Chet Bradley stalked down the center aisle.

"I've been around some," he said gruffly. "I've learned a few things....In France I saw good men--as good men as you are, Starke--splattered in hunks an' shreds against rocks an' trees; saw 'em hangin' in barbed-wire entanglements, wigglin' an' screamin'.

"I saw the dead dumped into trenches like hogs that had died o' the cholera; an' I saw 'em left to rot in No-Man's Land....Jest dead bodies--cheap as dirt....

"An' their lives cheap as dirt....

"I've seen helpless women an' children starvin' to death. I've heard mangled an' butchered men yellin' an' screamin'--heard 'em cursin' God Almighty....An' I've wanted to curse Him myself!

"He let them things happen....

"I stopped a few machine-gun bullets; an' a French general come an' kissed me a couple o' times--pinned a hunk o' brass on me. Maybe he thought it 'ould help me forgit them dead men's faces--but it didn't...Nor the screams o' the dyin'..

"I had to figger it out--or go nuts. A lot did go nuts...

"One thing I knew: God let it happen--or He couldn't do

nothin' about it....I said that there wasn't any God--but that jest didn't make sense. So--why did He let them things happen? Then I saw that He's always let things like that happen--that it's His Plan to let human bein's work out their own destiny....

"An' they learn, not by gittin' born or dyin'--but by livin' with other human bein's!

"But you, Starke," he accused, "have been tryin' to take over the job o' God Almighty! You ain't satisfied with the way He's done things. So you're tryin' to better His Plan--by changin' human nature! You want these young folks to fix their faces jest see--an' set around thinkin' how good it is o' God to save 'em from Hell-fire--an' help you save a few more, that He jest sort o' overlooked!

"You've been trainin' these young folks to die--not to live!

"Let me jest tell you a few things about livin': You do it every day--an' there's a natural an' normal way o' doin' it. That's God's Plan. The human soul is a growin' thing--it's shaped by livin'. Every part o' human life--childhood, youth, man--an' womanhood, old age--is a part o' His Plan.

"My God, Starke--can't you see that?

"Right now it's natural an' normal for these boys an' girls to play around like a bunch o' colts--for 'em to be sweetheartin'--for the boys to want to kiss the girls an' for 'em to want to be kissed. They'll be marryin' pretty soon, an' bringin' up children. That's what God planned for 'em to do.

"But you, Starke, figger them boys ought to be eunuchs--treat 'em like a pack o' savages, that are runnin' around tryin'

to rape every girl they meet! An' the girls--as though they're jest waitin' to be made prostitutes!

"My God, man! Why don't you think a little?"

CHAPTER IX

I

Professor Starke looked a living corpse. He arose, groped for words.

"I, the accuser, stand accused--and justly," he said. "I've been blind--bigoted--stupid....And I've failed--in the thing that meant most to me....Tomorrow I shall....hand in my resignation to the board of trustees...."

With the look of a damned soul trudging to its doom, he turned and started toward the door.

But they stopped him--for they realized that the man himself was Corinth. Without him, it would have been nothing. And they knew, all of them, that he had done what he thought was best for Corinth. Crowding around him, they begged him to reconsider his resignation.

Finally Clay Bryant pounded his gavel for order. Professor Starke spoke again, in his usual measured tones:

"You have given me, in spite of everything, an expression of confidence. I promise--with God's help--that I shall not fail you again...."

"I have not lived as Chester has lived. Perhaps, in the real sense, I have not lived at all....I have never known the impulses, the joys and thrills, of youth. Necessity--a discipline sterner than the one I have imposed upon you--forbade that I know them...."

"On Monday I shall make amends for my ill-considered

remarks which precipitated this--this discussion. I shall announce at chapel exercises that the rule in question has been abolished--"

He held up his hand to quiet the storm of applause. "And I shall announce that I wish to confer immediately with the presidents of the four societies, relative to forming a student-organization for self-government--"

That brought a real ovation. "I reckon that'll give those Corinthians an' Clios somethin' to think about!" Kate screamed into Jean's ear. Finally Professor Starke raised his hand again.

"There is no reason for you to discontinue your party," he said. "I feel--I am sure--you have a greater incentive for it than before. I feel that we have achieved a mutual understanding tonight--one which will operate for the good of Corinth."

When he had gone, Kate asked Clay and Sam about the 'surprise' they had promised. "We were goin' to dance--but it's all off now," Clay said. "That's one thing he'll never let us do, it's a mortal cinch."

"It isn't Professor Starke though," Sam reminded him. "It's this town, the Baptist Church, the board of trustees--an' the Southern Baptist Convention! If he let us dance, he'd be fired before mornin'."

Mary had agreed for Jean to stay with Kate that night. Before the girl reached home next morning, a highly colored account of the previous evening's happenings had preceded her up the street.

Mary demanded: "What kind o' carryin's-on were they havin' down at that College last night, 'Genie?"

Jean thought her mother was referring to the improvised Chain Gang. "Kate and I sat in front of Main Hall and watched it," she said. "But they didn't mean any harm. They were just playin', Mamma."

"Well--I heard different," Mary stated. "I heard that Starke had to come out on that campus an' put a stop to their carryin's-on. An' I heard he had to go up to that Athenian hall an' do it again."

"He didn't have to do any such thing!" Jean denied indignantly. "They invited him up to the Athenian Hall. They were having a meeting--and wanted him. Who told you all that, Mamma?"

"Never you mind who told me, 'Genie Taylor," Mary said. "I got it from them that saw it. Were they a-dancin' out there on that campus?"

"No, they weren't!" Jean exclaimed. "They were--just marchin' an' singin'. They were makin' fun of the Chain Gang, Mamma--you know how everybody hates it. An' we went up to the Athenian Hall to talk about it. Professor Starke promised to stop it, too."

"Were they a-dancin' up there in that hall?"

"No, they weren't. Whoever told you that they were--just made it up!"

Mary looked at her suspiciously. "Then--jest what happened up there in that hall? There ain't no use in your tryin' to beat around the bush, 'Genie Taylor. I know somethin' happened."

Jean sighed; she saw the Delphians--all the privileges she had hoped to enjoy with them--slipping away from her. But The societies had initiation pledges which they considered inviolable. And the Athenians and Delphians had been enjoined secrecy as to what had happened in their hall the night before. Obviously, if the story--magnified as it would be--reached the trustees of Corinth, it would jeopardize Professor Starke's position as president of the institution. They would consider it open rebellion against his authority.

"I--I just can't tell you any more, Mamma," the girl said.

"Mary's hands went to her hips. "Well! Things have come to a pretty pass--a pretty pass--if the goin's-on in them societies are so secret that girls can't tell their own mothers about 'em! From now on, 'Genie Taylor, you can jest stay away from them Delphians!"

Jean tried almost frantically to explain--that the secrecy involved Professor Starke and the organization for student-government, which he would announce the following Monday.

"Well!" Mary exclaimed again, "if them students have to help Starke run that College--I reckon it's time people knew about it. Yes, it's high time. An' furthermore--furthermore, young lady--you can jest forgit about them Delphians."

Bitterly resentful of her mother's stubborn unreasonableness, Jean went to her room and changed her dress. If she said any more, Mary would reply: "I've made up my mind--you jest needn't talk to me."

What was the use -- in anything?

The following week the Corinth Students' Association--the

"C.S.A."--was born. There was only one nominee for president--Chat Bradley. But when they put into their constitution a blanket penalty against "any and all students whose conduct reflects against the good name of Corinth", Jean realized that it was the same old story--that the burden of decision merely was being shared with Professor Starke by the students.

And later, when the question of school dances was brought up, the executive council remembered the stern, bigoted shadows of the trustees--of the school's 'benefactors'--of the Southern Baptist Convention--which stalked the glowering ramparts of Corinth's Fundamentalism. Corinth's President, the executive council, the student-body--all were prisoners in a citadel built on the twin-rocks, Original Sin and Damnation. And every stone in the walls was inscribed with a "Thou shalt not...."

II

On Thursday--the societies met on Friday nights--Jean went to the court house to see Judson. "Mamma says I can't go to any more Delphian meetings," she told him. "What shall I do about it, Papa?"

Judson sighed. "I jest can't say, honey--one way or the other. I reckon you'll have to do what you think best."

Jean sighed herself--went on up the street to Dr. Boone's office. He said: "Dang it, 'Genie--you've got to live your own life. An' the sooner you start doin' it, the better. Mary ought to have brains enough to know she can't live it for you--but she hasn't."

After supper the following night she came from her room wearing her coat. "I'm goin' to the Delphian meeting, Mamma,"

she said quietly. "I'll be back at ten-thirty."

Mary stalked to the front door, stood with her back against it. "You will--over my dead body, 'Genie Taylor!'"

Jean went back to her room and climbed out through the window. As she passed the boys' dormitory, Sam left a group of horseshoe-pitchers and joined her.

"What's the matter, Jean? You've been cryin'."

She told him what was the matter.

"What did your dad say about it?"

"He can't do anything. She'd make his life--just hell!"

"Like she's makin' yours, I reckon..."

They walked around the oval.

He said: "For a cent, Jean--for one red cent--I'd ask you to run away an' marry me."

"I couldn't.....I just couldn't."

"Don't you like me enough to?"

"Yes--I do."

He took her hand and squeezed it. "Why couldn't you? I could support us--an' work my way through school too. Other guys have done it."

"I know you could...."

Some one hissed: "Hey--cut that out!"

Sam released her hand. Tom Willis and Bee Morgan were behind them. "Bee jest thought I ought to remind you two babies in the woods that you're violatin' Section Four, Article Nineteen--'For the good o' the Institution'," Tom drawled.

Bee laughed. "I didn't say any such thing. What this place needs is more hand-squeezing!"

Tom took the hint. "'A fool there was--over a rag o' bone an' a hunk o' hair!'" he misquoted. And while they were arguing about that, Sam said:

"Listen, Jean, we can go to Asheville tomorrow. I've got a little money. We'll just--"

"No, we couldn't even get a license," she reminded him. "And we want to finish school, both of us. We just have to do that--before we can get married."

"Heck--I guess you're right...."

He waited for her until the Delphian meeting was over.

"But--holy smoke!" he exclaimed, as they passed the boys' dorm, "do you know what we've gone an' done?"

"What--have we?"

"We've just naturally got ourselves engaged!"

"Do you--really love me, Sam?"

"My God--you know I do!"

They had come to the Connors' stile. He took her in his arms and kissed her. "I love you too," she murmured....

He left her at the yard steps. Jean could see her mother's silhouette on the porch--Mary was waiting for her. With a murmured greeting, Jean hurried past her into the living room. Judson sat beside the big table lamp--holding a newspaper upside down. Hoping to postpone the ordeal, Jean started to her own room.

"'Genie Taylor--you come back here!'"

"What is it, Mamma?"

"You know what it is--well an' good!" Mary's voice was high-pitched with anger. "The thing you've done this night--

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you'll regret it the longest day you ever live!"

"I'm sorry, Mamma."

"You're not sorry! You're a disobedient, ungrateful child! You've broken God's own command--an' He'll punish you. Yes, you mark my words--He'll punish you!"

Judson tried to soothe her. "Now, Mary--don't be too hard on the child. She didn't want to disobey you--"

"Then--why did she? I'll tell you, Jud Taylor, She done it--because she's a hypocrite! She's jest pretendin' to have religion--so she can go places with that smooth-talkin' Sam Baron! An' I'd rather see 'er dead--yes, a thousand times!"

Jean ran to her room and closed the door.

III

Pale and washed-out, her eyes swollen from cryinb and loss of sleep, Jean came into the dingy room next morning and started setting the breakfast table. When Mary came from the kitchen with a platter of biscuits and a pot of coffee, the girl said: "Good morning, Mamma."

"The words were almost a prayer--but Mary ignored them. She did not look at or speak to Jean during the meal, or for the rest of the day. Somehow the girl managed to live through it

Kate came over that evening. Mary said coldly: "I reckon 'Genie's in her room." The two girls went out into the yard, sat under the walnut tree.

Kate murmured: "Don't let it git you down, Jean."

Jean said: "Sam asked me to run away with him last night. I wish I'd done it."

"No you don't!" Kate exclaimed. "Two years from now you

an' Sam would be just like Taylor Phillips an' Sue--with a couple o' kids, an' hardly enough to feed 'em."

Jean remembered the two youngsters who had eloped when she was a freshman at Corinth. They had returned from Asheville proud and confident. They would finish school--they would show the world it could be done...But there was no birth-control clinic in Boonville.

Now Phillips was a small renter--looked tired and defeated Sue, only eighteen years old, seemed a draggled, nagging, middle-aged woman....Jean shuddered as she realized that marriage--premature marriage--had done that to them.

Kate said: "You an' Sam can have a good time next year. Forget about marryin'--an' do that. Just let your ma simmer--till she gits over it."

Jean arose. "Let's go down to the drug store an' get an ice cream soda before it closes."

As they walked down the street, she said: "Mamma called me a hypocrite--but I've been a coward....I've never even dared to have a drink at a soda fountain--because she didn't 'approve' of it...."

As they sat at the counter, Doc Wigginhorn handed them a copy of "College Humor". "Sh--h!" he hissed; "I bootlegged this from Asheville!"

It was the first copy of the magazine Jean had ever seen.

"Is it--pretty bad?" she murmured to Kate.

"It goes through the mails, I reckon. Here--read this one!"

Since she was a toddler, Sunday had meant Sunday School and church to Jean. Now the thought of both was distasteful

to her. Mary had called her a hypocrite....She did not go to Sunday School the following Sunday, but she pondered the question of church.

She knew she was not a hypocrite....And failure to go to church would be merely a cheap gesture of spite toward her mother. She dressed for the service and came into the living room.

"I'll run over to Kate's an' go with her, Papa," she said.

Mary said gruffly: "Well, I reckon Jud Taylor can drive you over there." It was the first time Mary had spoke to her since Friday night.

Sam was at church. After the service he walked with the two girls to the drug store corner. "Why don't you come over to the house this evenin'?" Kate suggested. "Clay's comin'-- an' we might even pull down the shades an' dance."

"Swell!" Sam grinned. "How about it, Jean?"

"What about your folks, Kate?"

"Oh, they won't mind--they're civilized."

That evening Mr. Young elaborated on the statement.

"Ma an' me are goin' over to the Rices," he said. "You folks go ahead with your dancin'. We figger decent people can dance an' have a good time; an' what Kate does in her own home is her business an' ours. So far as I'm concerned-- you can pull up them window blinds."

Mrs. Young, however, objected to their raising the shade.

She said: "Not that I'm a hypocrite. But we have to live here. An' I hate bein' talked about."

From that Sunday evening almost to the end of the

school year the two couples were together when Kate could arrange it. Jean noticed that she seemed to want it that way--that she avoided being alone with Clay.

But she let him hug and kiss her shamelessly--teased Jean and Sam about their bashfulness. They, however, found less public opportunities for their love-making...Jean welcomed them. She had come to want his arms around her, straining her yielding softness to his own muscular body--inducing the delicious, painful ecstasy which she had come to look upon as the fulfilment of love and romance....

One Sunday afternoon, when she and Kate were waiting for their swains, Kate said: "You two had better learn to do your spoonin' in public, Jean. It's safer."

"Why--is it safer?"

"Because you're just like any other girl--even if you don't know it. An' Sam's a man."

"But Sam wouldn't--!"

"You both would--if you let yourselves go far enough."

Jean exclaimed: "I just don't believe it! We wouldn't do any such a thing!"

Kate smiled. "Well--maybe I'm wrong. Maybe you two just sit an' hold hands."

"We don't--just hold hands. But--"

Kate said: "All right, you're in love--you're crazy about each other. When you're alone with Sam, he just can't keep his hands off you--and you don't want him to....He just can't quit kissin' an' squeezin' you. An' you don't want him to....

"That's the way I feel about Clay," she confessed.

"I'm so crazy about him...sometimes I just want to die...if I can't have him."

Jean was bewildered. "But--doesn't Clay love you?"

"My God--you're so damned innocent!" Kate cried. "He says he loves me. Anyway, he wants me--because I'm a woman. Because I've got nice legs an' a few curves--where they ought to be....An' because he knows I'm--passionate...."

"But he's never goin' to marry me," she stated. "I'm just--torturin' us both, by runnin' around with him."

Jean was amazed. She tried not to be shocked at Kate's admission of sexual passion--and was shocked at it....Maybe Kate was a nymphomaniac. Jean had run across the word in a novel and had looked it up....

She said: "But maybe he does love you. Maybe he's just waiting."

Kate said: "No, he isn't. I've tried to think that. But a week after he leaves Boonville, there'll be some other girl....Not that I blame him, Jean. Clay's just--that way..."

After a few moments she went on: "Maybe you think I'm--an animal. An' maybe I am--what people call over-sexed. But it isn't my fault....If he just touches me--even looks at me--I'm limp as a dishrag."

"Is that why you won't--be alone with him?"

"Yes....Maybe I ought to go to Asheville--get a room on Blackbird Terrace--an' be the whore God meant me to be!"

Jean put her arms around the older girl. "You couldn't do that--you just couldn't, Kate! You'll have to forget him--somehow....."

"Could you forget Sam?"

Jean knew she couldn't.

That night Kate and Clay went for a walk to Locust Grove--alone.

IV

Clay was a senior. He left Boonville after commencement; Kate received one short letter from him--and no more. Sam had a summer job with the Geological Survey; he wrote long and gratifying letters to Jean. But she could not talk to Kate about them--or about Sam. She could see that Kate was keyed almost to the verge of hysteria. It showed in her laugh, in her feverish efforts to keep from thinking.

Jean was horrified by the possibility that Kate might be going to have a baby. Kate saw the question in her eyes.

"No--I'm not that big a fool," she muttered. Then she laughed hysterically. "Look at me!" she cried. "Just look at these breasts--these hips! I haven't any brains, Jean. I was made for just one thing--to have babies...I want to have 'em--an' God knows, I need to!"

Then she said hopelessly: "No, I reckon He don't know--or care...He just made me--an' turned me loose in Boonville."

Kate's parents were worried about her. They talked of sending her to visit relatives in the Middle West, but Kate did not want to go. The other girl's troubles made Jean almost forget her own--Mary's bitter looks and resentful sniff

She asked one day: "Kate, do you know Chet Bradley's been crazy about you ever since we went to Free School?"

Kate murmured indifferently: "Yes, I suppose so."

"I think he's awfully nice--don't you?"

"Yes--but he's goin' to be a preacher, I guess."

Chet had told Sam that he meant to be one, but he had not announced it publicly. Jean said not more about him for the moment, but she kept thinking about him. Chet was an R. F. mail carrier that summer. In a second-hand Model T Ford he passed the Taylors' every morning on his way to Little Ivy and California Creeks--his mail route. One morning Jean went down to the yard steps and waited for him.

"There's a lot of room in that car," she said. "Is there any law against your taking passengers?"

"There sure isn't," he grinned.

"How would you like for Kate an' me to drive with you over your route some morning?"

The grin broadened. "Swell--make it tomorrow!"

Kate agreed to the trip, without much enthusiasm, however. Jean worked it for her to sit next to Chet--and the narrow seat insured that she would sit close to him. Alone with Kate, he would have been self-conscious; but with Jean to support him, he gained confidence.

"You gals are the guests of Uncle Sam this mornin'," he boomed. "An' you've jest naturally got po-lice protection, too."

He patted the big automatic pistol strapped to the steering wheel.

"Goodness--wouldn't it be thrilling if somebody tried to rob the mail?" Jean exclaimed. "Then Chet could take his big gun an' rescue us, Kate!"

Kate was having trouble with her skirt. The wind blew it above her knees with brazen persistence. Chet seemed extremely busy driving--but his face was red. Jean giggled.

Kate tugged at the flapping skirt--said, "Damn!" Then she giggled too.

She said contritely: "I didn't mean to swear, Chet. Honest, I didn't."

He stopped the car. "Look here, you two," he rumbled. "If bein' a preacher means folks can't act natural with me--I'm givin' it up right now!"

He dragged a robe from behind the seat. "Here--wrap that around your legs," he said gruffly.

Kate simpered: "Heavens--what big lungs you have, Grandma!"

Jean said: "A gentleman always tucks the robe around the lady himself!"

Chet grinned: "Well--that lets me out." But he did a thorough job of the tucking.

Kate protested: "You'd think I was a Christmas package! The way you've got that thing wrapped, Chet--I'll just burn up."

"Take it off then--Hell-fire an' damnation!" Chet exploded. "I ain't afraid o' your legs--they ain't the first pair I've ever seen!"

Jean said: "But they're the prettiest pair--aren't they?"

"Yes," he said gruffly, "they are."

Kate blushed. "Shut up--both of you--an' let's get going!"

A few mornings later Jean saw him drive past the house with Kate beside him.

CHAPTER X

I

In a modest way, Boonville was a summer resort. And the 'summer boarders' were vigorously condemned for their worldliness by the townsfolk--especially by Deacon Sellers. A middle-aged widow, Mrs. Ainsworth, was the acknowledge leader of the summer group. She was said to be wealthy--had built the most pretentious house in town, had ~~brought~~ the first automobile to Boonville. She kept three Negro servants.

During the summer her big white house was always filled with guests--ranging from juveniles to old-maid aunts and bachelor uncles. But Mrs. Ainsworth assumed no airs of superiority to Boonville. Although not a Baptist, she went to church regularly; she was liked and respected by all who knew her with any degree of intimacy. So were her three children--whom Boonville had watched grow up.

Church and Bill Ainsworth were upper-classmen at Princeton; Carolyn, the youngest, was a finishing school product. But none of the three had been affected by post-War 'flaming youth'. A more sophisticated cousin accused that they 'wouldn't even light a candle'.

When they came to Boonville, however, they usually brought friends and relatives with a much higher kindling point--some of these actually 'flamed'. So the town lumped them all into one category of foreign wickedness--'summer boarders'--and resented them heartily.

It resented their colorful sports costumes--the expensive cars, filled with noisy young men and girls, that roared up and down Main Street--the two Russian wolfhounds, that must

be 'exercised'. It condemned the short skirts, sneered at the white trousers and buckskin shoes--and at the indifference of their wearers to its opinions.

But when the 'summer boarders' danced or played cards on the broad Ainsworth porch--Boonville fairly gnashed its teeth!

Deacon Sellers hastened to remonstrate with Mrs. Ainsworth about such 'carryin's-on'. He did once, that is. The woman gave him a look many degrees below the temperature of liquid air.

She said: "I have always been considered competent to handle my own affairs, Deacon. You may trust me to do so."

Later he threatened mightily to 'git the law on 'er'--but found nothing in it to cover the situation.

One night Mary said: "That Mrs. Ainsworth was up here this evenin', Jud. I reckon she's a right nice woman--an' a lady."

Judson glanced up from his paper with a mild show of interest.

Mary elaborated: "She heared that I'm a Metcalfe; an' she come to tell me she knows my own-born cousin, Alvirey Stockton--Alvirey Metcalfe, that wasp-down in Greenville. You could a-knocked me down with a feather."

Jean imagined the conversation--an orgy of genealogies--and forgot all about it. But Mrs. Ainsworth came again a few afternoons later, to get Mary's recipe for candied quinces. Jean was amusing herself at the piano--was improvising an imitation-Grainger arrangement of "DeepRiver", with bass melody and sixths and ninths added to the chords, for the

"blues" effect.

Mrs. Ainsworth came in to listen. She said: "You play beautifully, dear. Was that an improvisation?"

Jean admitted that it was. She played some Grieg--things she had memorized--and improvised another spiritual.

Mrs. Ainsworth said: "It's amazing, the way you do that. Who taught you?"

Judson had shown her how to fit chords to a melody, Jean explained. "When I started taking piano from Mrs. Wilson," she added, "I sort of learned the pieces she gave me that way. It's easier. You have to read the notes anyhow, so you might as well know what chords they make."

But most people, the woman realized, are content merely to read the notes--in more ways than the musical one...

She said: "It's a pleasure to listen to you. Would you come up to the house and play for us some evening?"

Jean was flattered by the invitation. She said: "I'd love to, Mrs. Ainsworth."

"We're just a few old folk--the children won't come until next week," the woman said. "But we love music, especial Cousin James. He sings rather well, but none of us can play his accompaniments."

Jean was afraid she couldn't. She had a vague idea that 'Cousin James' might want to sing opera--which was still a mystery to her. But Mrs. Ainsworth sent him music for her to practice, and the girl found it easy sight-reading. Most of it she already knew, and could play from memory.

She had agreed to go the following Saturday evening.

II

Jean dreaded going, however. She had had no social experience other than the limited contacts Mary had permitted--those of the church and of Corinth; and she knew that if she said or did the wrong things she would be sick with humiliation. The 'old folk' she would meet were from the outside world....

To Jean it was a mysterious world of cities, of wealth and its trappings, of polished speech--with unfamiliar cliches and 'small talk'; its inhabitants went to the opera, to concerts and art exhibits and lectures; they had formal dinners, luncheons, and teas; they maintained codes of dress, manners, and social usages which she believed infinitely complicated. And theirs was a world of mysterious 'sophistication', and--as Boonville believed--a world of wickedness.

Jean had contacted that world only in her reading.

Mary surprised her by saying: "'Genie Taylor, you go on up there an' play for them people--like she asked you. It's the least you can do."

Judson said: "You might as well, 'Genie. They're nice people. An' it won't hurt you to know 'em."

"What shall I wear, Mamma?"

"Jest what you'd wear a-goin' to anybody else's house. If them people's ways are different from ours, it's their look-out, I reckon."

The advice was a concession on Mary's part--the first she had given Jean since forbidding her to attend the Delphian meeting. The girl wondered why her mother chose to send her

into a home that sanctioned dancing and card-playing, when she had forbidden the other...

Jean went, however. Mrs. Ainsworth met her at the door and took her coat, although a Negro maid was waiting to do so. "Come in, dear," she said. "The others are around somewhere. I never can keep track of them--they're worse than children. Cousin James, I believe, has been pounding his finger with a hammer."

A rather distinguished-looking middle-aged man arose as they entered the living room. "Not exactly 'poundin'--I'm Jim Fitzgerald, Miss Taylor," he said. "Clara has a way of exaggeratin'. The hammer merely slipped."

"He's trying to build a chicken coop, from a plan in a magazine," Mrs. Ainsworth smiled. "But I imagine the chickens will laugh at it--if he ever gets it finished."

"I've been workin' on the damned thing for a week--those plans are crazy," he stated. "Do you know anything about chicken coops, Miss Taylor?"

Jean had noticed the missing consonants. She said: "I helped Papa build a shed once. That is--I held the nails."

He chuckled. "Just what I've been needin'! You come an' hold the nails--an' I'll finish that coop if it kills me!"

'Aunt Minnie' and 'Aunt Agatha'--identified to Jean as Miss Reynard and Mrs. Parsons--came in while he was speaking.

"James is always looking for pretty girls to hold the nails--how-do-you-do, Miss Taylor," Aunt Minnie, the washed-out one said. "It's a mystery to me, James, that you've never married."

Aunt Agatha, the plump one, recognized the introduction with a smile.

"Saint Paul said: 'It is better to marry than to burn'," Cousin James observed. "But a few scorchin's, Minnie, are better than the fryin' pan of matrimony."

Aunt Agatha smiled again: "But you, James, have been a constant conflagration!"

Mrs. Ainsworth said: "That's James' cue to begin boring us with the story of his blighted life, Jean. Will you plan for us--before he starts?"

"No, I'll sing first," he said. "If Miss Taylor doesn't mind, that is. My singin' should be consummated with firmness, prayer, an' expedition."

His voice was a rather pleasant baritone, however. He sang "Ah, Sweet Mystery of Life" and "O Promise Me", tried "Mandelay"--and got off key on the verse.

"Damn it," he chuckled, "I always get off right at the start. What was I doin' wrong this time?"

"You were a minor third low," Jean told him. She showed him how to get the pitch from the introduction. When he had done the song to his satisfaction, he asked her to play alone.

She did so, without self-consciousness. She was pleased to realize that her playing interested people who had heard great artists--for it did, obviously. Not that the girl considered herself one. Mrs. Wilson, her teacher, had been intelligent enough to impress on her the fact that people like to hear familiar things done well. And she had learned from Judson to use her developing technique creatively....

Jeff, the Negro butler and chauffeur, came in presently with a tray of drinks. When he came to Jean, she noticed there were two kinds--hesitated before making a choice of them.

Cousin James suggested: "Try the golden fizz, Jean. I can vouch for 'em."

"They sho' is good, Mistah Fitzgerald," Jeff grinned. "I done sampled 'em--while I was a-mixin' 'em."

Mrs. Ainsworth said firmly: "No, James, I'm sure Jean would prefer the ginger ale."

As the girl took the drink, Jess said: "We-alls in the kitchen was a-listenin' to you play, Miss. We sho' enjoyed it."

Jean smiled at him. "Thank you," she said. "I'm glad you did."

"Jeff knows hundreds of spirituals, Jean," Mrs. Ainsworth said. "Do that one about the stars for her, Jeff."

He grinned. "No, they's jest ol' church sons, Miss Clara," he denied. "I reckon I couldn't sing that 'un. I'd jest be skeered to death."

"Nonsense, Jeff--you sing all day long. And we hear it and enjoy it," Mrs. Ainsworth said. "Miss Taylor will play it with you, if you'll hum a little of it for her."

Nothing loath, he set down the tray and went with Jean to the piano, hummed a few bars until Jean got the key and the simple melody. Then he sang:

"You will cry to the rocks an' the mountains--
You will cry to the rocks an' the mountains--

You will cry--to the rocks an' the mountains!
When the stars begin to fall...."

The other two Negroes came to the dining room door and stood listening. Mrs. Ainsworth smiled at them and motioned

for them to sit down. Jeff sang one spiritual after another, in a pure lyric tenor--with considerable technic and real feeling. Fascinated by the weird, haunting variations he threw into the melodies, Jean accompanied them with soft improvisations--which the Negro sensed and blended his voice with. It was the most thrilling musical experience she had ever had--matching her creative ability with that of another....

Finally Mrs. Ainsworth said: "We could listen to that all night--but Jean's mother will be worrying about her. We aren't going to thank you, Jeff. For we know you enjoyed it as much as we did."

"I didn't do nothin' else but," he grinned. "I ain't never seen nobody that can play the piano like she can."

"You've studied music, though, Jeff," Jean said. "You couldn't sing that way, if you hadn't. It was just wonderful to play for you."

"I've studied some," he admitted. "But them accompanists they jest don't know how to play nothin' but notes."

Cousin James insisted on driving Jean home. While Jeff was getting the car, Mrs. Ainsworth said: "It was generous of you to come, Jean. When the children get here for their vacations, they'll have some parties--a dance, anyway. I'll speak to your mother about it."

III

"How did you git along at the Ainsworths', 'Genie?" Dr. Boone asked the following day.

"I had a wonderful time," she told him. "Did you know I was going?"

He had--had known considerably more about it than he admitted. "Clara Ainsworth told me she was goin' to ask you," he said. Jean told him about the evening--that Jeff had sung and she had played for him.

"Them people aren't snobs. They know a nigger's a human bein', the same as they are," he said. "You go there every chance you git, 'Genie. A smart gal can learn a few things--jest by keepin' her eyes open."

Jean already had learned many things....

Kate came over a few afternoons later. She had gone with Chet on his route that morning. "We're engaged--an' I'm so happy I could bust wide open!" she exclaimed. "We're goin' to git married before school starts this fall--an' we want you an' Sam to stand up with us. I'm quittin' school. I've got more important things to think about!"

Jean was almost as thrilled as Kate. Chet planned to rent a small house near Corinth, Kate told her. He had arranged to keep his mail route and go to school in the afternoons. The route would support them, with something left over for his four years at Chapel Hill--they hoped.

Kate said: "If he wants to be a preacher, I just don't care! I'm crazy about him. I'm goin' to make him a good wife--if it kills me!"

The following Monday Jean went with them to Asheville, to buy Kate's wedding clothes. On the way she asked: "Chet, did you ever drink a golden fizz?"

"Sure--but a Singapore sling's got more kick to it. Why did you ask that, Jean?"

"Because I want to drink one. Could you get it for me in Asheville?"

He chuckled; Kate laughed. "I'll sure try mighty hard," he promised.

He got her the fizz--served a la prohibition, in a teacup. Jean thought it tasted nasty....

Sam wrote that he would be in Boonville the following Sunday, and Jean began planning excitedly as to how she might see him without bringing on another major clash with Mary. Kate invited them over there, but Sam had written that he had something important to tell Jean. She wrote that she would meet him on the Corinth campus at one o'clock, that they could go for a walk somewhere. Anywhere, she thought, so long as they were alone together.

Anxious to impress him with her 'maturity' and 'sophistication', Jean dressed carefully for the tryst. And as a final daring touch, she rolled her stockings below her knees--a style common in Asheville, but considered rank indecency in Boonville.

She lied obliquely to Mary--said: "I'm goin' down to the College, Mamma."

As usual, Mary's answer was a sniff. Jean hoped her mother wouldn't notice the rolled stockings--hoped Sam would do so.

He did, immediately. "Hot stuff!" he grinned as he ogled her bare knees. "An' you're sweeter than ever, Jean!"

She squeezed his hand. "You're brown as an Indian," she said. "You-- look grand, Sam!"

He said: "I've filled out--look at those!"

He flexed the muscles of his arms--tapped her on the chin with his left fist, then with his right. "That's six months in the hospital--an' that's sudden death!"

She jeered: "Terrible! I've heard Hammer Bill say that--but maybe the hill-billy girls liked it."

"You bet they did! Got a gal in every holler, Jean."

They decided to climb to the top of Bailey Mountain. She said: "Maybe we'll find Ol' Eph Hilliwell's still!"

On the way across the fields they watched mother partridges fluttering along the path, caught glimpses of the brown chicks scurrying away through the grass. At the foot of the mountain was a mint-bordered spring. Sam and Jean crushed sprays of the herb and inhaled its pungent aroma--drank on their hands and knees from the spring.

Gray squirrels railed at them as they climbed the shaded, winging trail--whisked behind tree trunks and peered at them. Sam pointed to a tuft of mistletoe high in the top of a blackgum.

She said: "It isn't Christmas--an' we aren't exactly under it!"

He picked her up and carried her under it. They forgot about climbing the mountain....

They sat down on the moss carpet beneath the blackgum, his arm around her, Jean's head on his shoulder. "I've missed you--just like Hell!" he said. "I get up in the mornin's thinkin' about you, an' I go to sleep thinkin' about holdin' you...."

Jean slipped her arms around his waist and gave him the 'tight squeeze' of a little child. "I love you so much,

Sam--I could just squeeze you to death!"

He cradled her in his arms; and she lay there, eyes closed, waiting for his kiss....Then she felt his arms relax and opened her eyes. His face was covered with a hot flush above his tan; he was biting his lips.

She asked: "What's the matter, Sam? Is--anything the matter?"

He was staring at her bare knees....Then his hand was warm against the round softness of her thigh....

He muttered: "You're wearin'...rolled socks."

"Yes....maybe I shouldn't have...."

A listlessness had crept into her brain--a delicious fog of feeling. Nothing mattered but the kiss that had been interrupted. She gave him her lips...

Presently she realized dimly that she and Sam were lying on the moss--that he was fumbling at her clothing....

Awareness returned, like a dash of water in the face. She sprang up and adjusted her dress. "Sam--we just couldn't!"

"He got up. "God! I couldn't help it, Jean!"

"I know-- but we couldn't do that...."

"Why couldn't we?" he cried. "We aren't kids--we're old enough to want each other! Men an' women have been--the way we do--for a million years!"

"But they've waited...until they were married."

Kate had not. She had gone walking with Clay Bryant... And Trixie had 'played out'....

He said: "Yes--some wait! That survey crew--all except me--went to Blackbird Terrace last night."

"You....came to see me...."

"Jean--I'm human! You are too--an' this world's just cock-eyed!"

It was, she realized. They were aching for each other--helpless to do anything about it...But they weren't helpless. He said:

"I love you, Jean--we love each other. My God, honey--I wouldn't get you into trouble! I'd -- see to that."

She knew what he meant; Kate had told her...

But the mores of Boonville, Mary, and the Baptist Church had not been ground into Kate's mental processes. Jean was beginning to question those mores, but she could not deliberately violate the supreme 'Thou shalt not commit....'

She murmured: "You wrote you had something to tell me, S

He took a small box from his pocket. Jean opened it--found inside a small diamond engagement ring.

"Sam!--it's beautiful."

He slipped it on her finger. He said: "I'm mighty proud to give you that--I earned it this ummer. An'--I guess you know what goes with it."

In his arms she whispered: "I'll love you, Sam--always..

IV

The young Ainsworths came to Boonville the following week, and dashed off immediately for a camping trip to Bald Mountain. Carolyn Ainsworth asked Jean to go with the, but Kate's wedding prevented her from doing so.

The wedding was a quiet home affair. It was over almost before Jean realized it had begun--and she and Sam were waving and shouting to Kate and Chet as they drove away. Sam had tied a sign to the old Ford--"JUST MARRIED! Off to a RATTLING GOOD FAMILY!"

He had managed to get in from the survey--had driven one of the trucks--but had to go back that night. When he had gone, a feeling of alone-ness came over Jean...Kate was a married woman now; and she, Jean, had to keep on being a girl....

The Ainsworths came back from their trip. Carolyn invited Jean to a party the following Saturday night. She said "Don't wear anything fussy. When you dance with my brothers and Pinkie Santerre--you'll need room for leg-action."

Jean agreed to go, but she did not want to especially. Mooning over Sam--as she had been since he had given her the ring--she was not much interested in the young Ainsworths.

She said to Mary: "They're going to dance, Mamma."

But Mrs. Ainsworth had spoken to Mary about that. Mary said: "That woman's a decent, respectable woman. An' I reckon she'll see that they do their dancin' decently."

Jean wore a green linen dress, with white cuffs and collar. Judson said: "You look mighty pretty, honey." He drove her to the Ainsworths' in the buggy.

As the maid let her in, Bill Ainsworth and a red-haired, freckled youth Jean had not met pounced upon her. "Beat it--scram, blue-foot!" the red-head shouted. "I saw her first!"

He whirled Jean down the hall--through the dining room to the living room, where the others were dancing to a phonograph. Mrs. Ainsworth, trotting around more-or-less sedately with Cousin James, smiled and waved at the girl. But the red-head whirled her to the middle of the floor.

There he went into an Indian dance--circling her, with a pivoted finger on her head. "Kneel--squaw!" he shouted.

Jean dropped on one knee, and he pranced before her--thumping his chest and glaring at her: "Me!--heap-big Seminole chief--Pinkie Santerre! You--pale-face squaw! We make big medicine--see?"

Bill Ainsworth interrupted the 'medicine'. He snatched Jean from the protesting Pinkie and whirled with her until the phonograph stopped. Then he tried to introduce her to the others.

"This is Jean Taylor--that Pinkie was trying to scalp," he grinned. "The dizzy dame over there's Toots Storey, Jean. And the bean-pole with the Adam's apple is--"

"Stop!" Pinkie shouted. "She's my squaw--we wuz papooses together! Unhand her, pale-face villain! We're gonna make medicine!"

He dragged her to the phonograph and changed the record. He said: "You shake a wicked hoof, kid--what I mean! Where did you learn to follow a crazy goof like me?"

"Heavens--I didn't learn!" Jean laughed. "I just had to--or be mangled!"

He shouted: "Hey, Carolyn--this dame's got a line! She claims she's never learned to dance!"

Jean liked the idea of having a 'line'. She smiled mysteriously--she said: "Nobody dances in Boonville--do they, Carolyn?"

Carolyn laughed: "In Boonville? Jean does it with mirrors, Pinkie."

Mrs. Ainsworth came over--shook her finger at him. "Pinkie Santerre--you've spiked that punch!"

"I didn't, Aunt Clara--cross my heart an' hope to die!" He dropped on his knees and clasped his hands. "Listen, Aunt Clara--don't pour it out! It wasn't gin--just the cookin' sherry! Just a drop of it--just half-a-drop! Cousin James--tell her it was just a spoonful!"

"Two spoonfuls--at least," Cousin James smiled. "But it won't hurt anybody, Clara."

"That stuff--huh!" Pinkie snorted. "It wouldn't make a kitten drunk."

But a few moments later he muttered to Jean: "What does she know about punch--ol' battle-axe Clara? I put the whole bottle in, kid--an' a slug o' gin, too!"

Chuck Ainsworth had given her a cup of the punch. Jean wondered if he knew Pinkie had spiked it. She danced with the bean-pole--his name was 'Slick' something-or-other--and waltzed with Cousin James.

He said: "Pinkie must have put somethin' else in that punch. Our good Clara is waxin' a bit worried about it."

Mrs. Ainsworth had reason to. The blonde girl, Toots Storey, was now languishing in an arm-chair with Slick. Jean saw her kiss him and rumple his hair. Pinkie was trying to dance with Caroly. They crashed into Church and Aunt Minnie, caromed off and sat down on a couch--hugging each other in an ecstasy of merriment. Bill--Aunt Agatha had abandoned him to cherish a stepped-on-foot--joined Pinkie and Carolyn on the couch. The three rocked back and forth, trying to sing to the phonograph--each in a different key.

Mrs. Ainsworth beckoned to Cousin James. "That disgrace! Pinkie lied, James," she said. "He's deliberately trying to

get the children drunk--he's boasted that he would. Just look at Carolyn!"

Cousin James said: "Let Chuck handle it, Clara."

Chuck already was doing so. He was speaking to Bill and Carolyn. They got up, leaving Pinkie sprawled on the couch. Chuck stopped the phonograph.

"'Lyn and I are making some coffee, mother," Bill murmured as they went to the kitchen.

The two in the arm-chair sat up, looked around sheepishly. Pinkie had passed out on the couch. In half a minute the tempo of the party had diminished to largo.

Church revived it, however. He started the phonograph and shuffled over to Jean; Mrs. Ainsworth and Cousin James arose to dance; and Bill and Carolyn came from the kitchen--they had left the maid to make the coffee--and pranced around the room in an exaggerated cake-walk. Presently they went back to the kitchen.

Church said: "Want a slug o' java, kid?"

Jean had drunk only one cup of the punch, but he knees were none too steady. She said: "Yes, I do, Chuck."

"We can't even serve cocktails--because of that nut out there," he said in the kitchen. "Mom's trying to look after him this summer--but I'd like to take him out and drown him!"

Jean realized the difference between cocktails and spiked punch....

CHAPTER XI

I

Jean wrote Sam about the party--including the item that Chuck had walked home with her afterwards. When Sam came back that fall, he made a great pretense of jealousy--warned her about 'city slickers' whose motto was 'Love 'em an' leave 'em.' But Jean could see that it was more than a pretense--that he resented her association with the Ainsworths.

She did not regret that however. The fact that she had been accepted by all of them--Pinkie had 'rushed' her on sight, and had tried to make a date with her a few days after the party--bolstered her self-assurance considerably. And it wouldn't hurt Sam, she reasoned, to know she was attractive to others.

Besides, he had hinted about 'hill-billy' girls that were 'hot stuff', even after he had given her the ring. Jean recognized the hints as a counter-move to make her jealous, but she played up to them, pretended to believe them.

Chet and Kate moved into their house before school opened. Kate's first attempt at an elaborate dinner was for Jean and Sam.

"She's been tryin' it on the dog--an' I ain't dead," Chet grinned. "If you two live, she'll ask her pa an' ma."

While Kate and Jean fussed ecstatically over fried chicken, biscuits, and the rest of it, he and Sam shouted 'encouragement' from the front room: "Say--are you raisin' that pullet from an egg?" and "Don't hurry, Kate--Chet's just passed out!"

The Bradleys helped Jean solve the love-making problem which had bothered her considerably. With a significant experience of her own to bolster it, she took Kate's advice-- belatedly--about 'heavy spoonin''. She and Sam could see each other at the Bradleys when they chose, of course. Jean saw to it that they did their love-making there. Now she realized why Kate had said it was 'safer'....

On the whole Jean's senior year at Corinth was a happy one. She had achieved a temporary, working mental adjustment-- even to Mary's sniffs and grim "I've got nothin' to say". But Mary's attitude was still one of passive condemnation. Her child had disobeyed her, and had not repented....The year was not a significant one, however, Through it Jean merely followed a behavior-pattern which had been shaped for her. She had not yet learned to make her own patterns.

Sam was elected president of the Athenians--everyone had known that he would be--and Jean was chosen secretary of the students' association. With Chet as president it began to function--haltingly. One of the first things Chet had to do was to argue the societies out of reviving clandestine dances.

"It'll kill everything we're workin' for," he told them. "You've got plenty o' right to dance--but none to hurt this school. An' it's still Baptist...."

Both Sam and Larry Woodall, the Corinthian president, had argued for the dances. Jean wondered what would happen to the Corinth Students' Association when Chet was gone....

Larry Woodall was valedictorian that year. He won over Sam with a one-per-cent higher grade average. At commencement Larry discoursed heavily on "The Irreparable Past". Holding th

the bouquet Sam had got her from Asheville, Jean looked at him and winked. It would be over in a few minutes...

Mary's sense of duty--she would 'do her duty, if it killed her--had made her soften somewhat toward Jean during graduation week. After it was over, the girl tried for a reconciliation.

She said: "Mamma, can't you forget about--about my disobeying you last year?"

Mary said: "You made your bed that night, 'Genie Taylor--now you can lie in it. An' I'll not forgit it, no, not to the day I'm dead--an' buried in the ground!"

II

Sam worked for the Geological Survey again that summer. He and Jean had arranged to enter the University at Chapel Hill in the fall--he to take pre-legal work; Jean to major in public school music. Judson had agreed to her going, had said he could manage her expenses. Mary had sniffed--had said: "I've got nothin' to say, Jud Taylor."

But she had said something to Dr. Boone. Jean had heard them discussing it. Mary had exclaimed: "It'll be her everlasting' ruination, John Boone--you mark my words!"

And he had snorted: "Hoss-manure! Jest plain stinkin' hoss-manure, Mary! Do you expect to keep 'er in this Slough o' Despond all her life?"

Jean had not heard the rest of it. Nor did she know that the doctor had offered to advance the money for her expenses, that Judson had agreed to let him....Chet and Kate had gone to the University for the summer term; Jean as to room with them in the fall. She was thrilled at the prospect.

With them and Sam there, the University promised her release and fulfillment....

But all three were away that summer. Jean had little to do except read and practice the piano. Mary would not talk to her; Judson was at the court house until five o'clock; and Dr. Boone left after a week or two to attend a medical convention somewhere. When he returned, Jean asked him to let her stay in his office--on the pretext that she wanted to read some medicine.

"Not figgerin' on bein' a doctor, are you, 'Genie?"

"No--but it won't hurt me to read about it."

He chuckled: "It 'ould hurt some folks. They jest couldn't survive it!"

But he knew the situation with Mary. "Don't think too hard o' her, 'Genie," he said thoughtfully. "Mary's jest 'eschewin' evil'....She's tryin' to do what she thinks is God's will, I reckon."

"She has a mighty funny way of doin' it, though."

"Yeah, the will o' God--in Boonville--is an amazin' thing, 'Genie."

But Jean had another reason for wanting to be in the doctor's office: Sam had written her that his crew was moving to the Burnsville vicinity--that he might be able to telephone her from there. She wrote him the hours she would be at Dr. Boone's....

As they had done the previous year, the young Ainsworths came to Boonville around the middle of August. Carolyn invited Jean to go with them to Bald Mountain. They went every year,

and Jean had been wanting to make the trip since she was a child. The Corinth student body--strictly supervised--went each spring, but Mary had not allowed Jean to go with them. It embarrassed the girl to admit that she never had been there

Carolyn said: "It's just a sort of family party. Chuck hasn't any girl, and I haven't any beau--unless you count Pinkie." She grimaced. "He's with us again this year. He's just gone to the dogs--drinking, and all that. Mamma thought we ought to bring him."

Jean agreed to go. Chet and Kate, who had returned from summer school, said that she should--that Sam had no right to think she shouldn't. And Judson--and even Mary--seemed pleased that she had decided to.

But Sam telephoned from Burnsville the day before they were to leave for Bald Mountain. Jean told him of the proposed trip.

He said gruffly: "I don't like that--a damned bit!"

"Heavens--why not, Sam?"

"You wouldn't even go walkin' with me last year," he accused. "Why should you go chasin' around over the mountains with that bunch o' damned snobs?"

"They aren't snobs!"

"Well, you know what I think--you can do what you please about it!"

"I'm going to! You're just being silly--"

"He growled "O.K.!" --and hung up.

Jean was furious--he was just getting too bossy! He was unreasonable--he must think that he owned her! She would go--and show him that he didn't.....But it was their first real

quarrel. Jean cried herself to sleep that night..

On the way to the foot of Bald Mountain, she sat with Chuck Ainsworth, who drove the big car. Mrs. Ainsworth and Cousin James occupied the back seat, with baggage stacked around them. Bill, Pinkie, Caroly, and Betty Southerlin-- Bill's current flame--were in Bill's roadster; the Negroes, Jeff and Nancy, brought the camping equipment in an old truck.

The rough roads gave Chuck little opportunity to talk. Jean was hardly conscious of him until they reached the foot of the mountain. She was thinking of Sam....

But everybody had to walk up the mountain, and the baggage had to be taken. They had stopped at a farmhouse to leave the cars. Jeff dickered with the farmer for a pack-horse to carry the heaviest equipment; Chuck distributed the rest of it--giving Pinkie a suitcase.

Pinkie protested: "What do you think I am, Chuck-- a donkey?"

Chuck grinned: "Sure, Pinkie--you said it!"

Before they started up the mountain, Jean saw Pinkie talking to the farmer--saw him give the man money....

III

Pinkie yelled: "Let's get goin'! Where's my pardner?"

He looked at Jean. But Chuck said, "We'll break trail, kid."

His long legs carried him ahead of the others, and Jean kept pace with him. She did not want to talk with Pinkie. Chuck could talk, if he cared to, she found.

He said: "That farmer down there--did you notice that block of hungry, dirty kids?"

Jean had noticed them. "They're--just pathetic, Chuck."

"Why should society penalize itself--and them--by letting them be Born?"

The implications of the question were too much for Jean. She said: "What could we--what could society do about it

He said: "We use selective breeding with our horses and cattle. Our human strain is a million times more important. Half those poor kids are mental defectives, from the looks of them; but we'll let them go on reproducing themselves--and will build insane asylums to take care of 'em. It just doesn't make sense, Jean."

She realized that he meant birth control and sterilization of the unfit. She had read about them--but Boonville and Corinth did not talk about such things. Chuck, however, had assumed that she would not be embarrassed by them.

She asked: "Why doesn't the Church do something about it

"The Church--huh! That fellow's ancestors came to this country as the Man with a Hoe, Jean. But we took the hoe away from 'em and gave it to the Negroes--because it was cheaper. The ancestors--not all of 'em, but some of 'em--just settled down where they could and became 'poor white trash'. We did nothing to educate 'em; we said they had 'equality of opportunity'--when they lacked the capacity to take it.

"And we never have done anything about 'em. They're--just 'poor white trash'--breeding a generation of the unfit, incapable of perpetuating our civilization!

"The Church--we, the landowners, the people with wealth, and influence, are the Church, Jean!"

But he was going too fast for her. "Why are you the Church? Aren't there poor churches--ones whose members are poor?"

"Yes, but churches are supported by wealth--not by poverty," he stated. "And the ones who could do anything about it weren't interested. Churches don't question the hand that feeds 'em, Jean--in any level of society. You don't dance at Corinth--because the Southern Baptist Convention says you can't."

She said: "I can see that--but why is the Church against such things as birth control and sterilization of the unfit? I should think that people with wealth and influence--who shape the Churches' policies, you say--would see that we have to have them."

"Tradition--people use it to keep from thinking. The Man with a Hoe--and the Negroes--had big families. They were an economic asset--cheap labor. So the churches said it was the will of God for people to have big families. Now they can't about-face--until they're told to."

"Hasn't the Church ever done anything for the common man

"It's 'saved' him--since the Reformation!" he chuckled.

"What do you mean? Didn't the Church always 'save' him?"

"Not until the Reformation glorified him--by 'damning' him! Before the Reformation the common man was not even important enough for the Church to 'damn'. The Reformation did that to him--and made him worth 'saving'."

Jean smiled: "Well--that was something, anyway."

"Yes, but the trouble is that he wasn't 'damned'--he was merely ignorant. And the churches aren't even 'saving'

themselves from that!"

"You don't think much of the churches."

He did not answer for a few moments. Then he said: "Our has been very solicitous of my welfare, Jean....Mother has a little money, you see. She gives 'em stained-glass windows and things!"

She said: "But--heavens, Chuck! Why are you so bitter about that? Stained-glass windows are beautiful--an' you're intelligent. Why shouldn't your church be interested in you, as well as the windows?"

"I don't like preachers," he stated. "I don't like their unctious hand-squeezing and back-slapping. To me, their vestments are the do-dads of a slimy medicine man; their churches with their 'sacred' emblems--are his cave; and their patter of ritual and dogma is his mumbo-jumbo cant--sweetly intoned to propitiate the evil spirits!"

He stopped, turned and looked at her. "And their God, Jean--He's still those evil spirits! Still the fears, superstitions, and ignorance of the masses--which fostered the graft of the medicine men--and is still the graft of the preachers! Why should they tear up their meal-tickets?"

"Are they--all hypocrites?"

"No--merely the intelligent, educated ones. The ones that determine the policy of the churches. But let somebody start a social reform--one that digs into the purses that feed 'em--and see where they stand!"

"The churches actually help the poor though, Chuck. They send out missionaries; they have shhools and orphan asylums--"

"They give the poor the scrapings from their tables--nothing more. And why shouldn't they propagandize their graft with schools, orphan asylums, and missionaries--when they have thousands of ignorant, conscientious boobs to do the work for 'em?

"But their graft is breaking down anyway, Jean," he declared. "The churches have had to rationalize 'original sin', 'Hell', 'the Devil'--'Transubstantiation', 'inspiration of the Bible', 'Virgin Birth', and a lot of others--because the masses are getting too intelligent to stomach 'em. Now, after nearly two thousand years, the Church is beginning to cast sheep's eyes at 'Social Service'--which Christ Himself preached and practiced!"

It was overwhelming to Jean. She was too ignorant, she realized, to refute it....But there must be answers to it... There had to be....She murmured: "Where does God come in, Chuck?"

He said: "God is no hypocrite....I'm afraid He doesn't--attend the church conventions, Jean."

IV

Pinkie came up and threw down the suitcase--sat on it.

"Talk about slaves, totin' Spanish gold!" he panted. "They had nothin' on Pinkie! An' you two--cool as dry martinis, with four-star gin an' French vermouth! Stir well, an' mix with a dash of good ol' Bald Mountain--an' what have

Chuck smiled: "You wouldn't know, Pinkie. Jean and I have been talking religion."

"Well--just hush my mouf! 'The trees were God's first

temples'--so us cullah'd folks done took to the tall timber!"

Chuck asked: "Did you see Mother and the others back there?"

Pinkie yawned: "They're comin'--like Christmas."

Chuck said: "I think I'll run back and see how Mother's making it, Jean."

Pinkie got up and bowed: "My life is dedicated to the cause of innocence an' virtue, good sir. You may confide this fair damsel to my keepin'--without misgivin's, apprehensions, or miscellaneous scruples--world without end: Amen!"

Chuck smiled at Jean and started back down the trail.

When he was out of earshot, Pinkie grunted: "Huh! Talkin' religion to a dame would be his idea of givin' her a thrill. Me--I'm different, kid."

"What would you talk about, Pinkie?"

"I'd chin anent sealin' wax, safety pines, an' sarsaparilla. I'm no highbrow--just a plain man. I take my whiskey--an' my women--straight. I like everything plain--except the women!"

"That's interesting."

"What I mean to say, kid--you aren't plain!"

Jean laughed. "You'd better rest after that, Pinkie. The effort was terrific!"

"I'm a man of few words," he stated. "But I feel deeply. An' I've learned there's no percentage in beating about the bush."

"Do you long to clasp me to your manly bosom, Pinkie?"

"Nothin' else but--I yearn over you, kid. You've got what it takes."

Jean laughed at his owl-like seriousness: "Do you yearn over Carolyn too?"

"That dame! She wouldn't recognize an emotion--if she met it on a desert island!"

"How do you know she wouldn't?"

"I've tried to warm her up--that's how I know!"

Jean was a little taken back at his frankness. She said: "Did it ever occur to you, any any chance, that a girl might not want to be 'warmed up'--by you, Pinkie?"

"Don't try to hand me that line," he retorted. "I wasn't born yesterday--I know when a dame's got what it takes. You ~~have~~--an' you've been wastin' it on sticks like Chuck. What do you think you're goin' to do--live a million years?"

"I'll--live till I get married. Then I hope to keep on doing so for several years. I happen to be engaged, Pinkie."

"Huh--what's that got to do with it? Don't you like variety? Do you think your guy's sittin' around twiddlin' his thumbs while you're away from him?"

He leaned toward her: "Listen--I made a deal with that high mountain-boomer to bring me up some moonshine tonight. He's goin' to leave it at the first fence--fifth post to the left. Sneak out with me after that bunch of sticks have gone to sleep--an' we'll have ourselves a time, kid!"

"No, I'm not interested, Pinkie."

He looked at her speculatively, switched to another approach.

"Haven't you any sympathy for a guy? I'm no good, I know--but how could I be?"

"Why couldn't you be --some good? What's stopping you?"

He muttered: "I--just d on't know. ...I've never had a home. My mother's divorced--my dad doesn't give a damn about me. An' the lug Mother married the last time hates me. So she packs me off, from one school to another, to get rid of me...

"An' I'm sick of this 'poor relation' stuff!" he exclaimed. "I'm sick of havin' Aunt Clara an' her brats sneer at me--because I'm no good!"

"They wouldn't sneer at you, Pinkie."

"No, they don't sneer," he admitted. "They just act virtuous--an' superior...They really are good to me, I guess."

Maybe, she thought, they didn't understand him....Mary didn't understand her....Even Sam. had misjudged her....

"Pinkie," she said, "I want to talk to you. Will you let me?"

"You'd be wastin' your time, kid. I've been talked to by experts--an' it didn't do any good."

She said: "Here comes Chuck. I'll find an opportunity, Pinkie. And I won't talk to you--that way."

CHAPTER XII

I

But she had no opportunity for the next three days. Pinkie kept away from her. If he had got the moonshine, however, Jean saw no signs that he was using it. Pinkie became a model of good behavior, and the girl wondered what had worked the change in him.

Mrs. Ainsworth said: "Pinkie's grown wings--I think he has a crush on you, dear. He looks at you, but keeps away from you. That's phenomenal--for Pinkie."

Jean said: "I think he's afraid I'll start preaching to him."

But she wondered if he actually had fallen in love with her--and was ashamed, now, to talk to her...It seemed more likely that he had concluded she was a 'stick', and was deliberately avoiding her....

Chuck organized the camp routine quickly and efficiently. He made it almost a ritual, in fact. Proud of his cooking ability, he did most of the cooking; and Bill, who considered himself an expert with an axe, chopped most of the wood. Mrs. Ainsworth insisted on making the coffee--although Chuck and Cousin James argued that their brands were superior to hers; and everybody had to make up his own bed--subject to Chuck's inspection.

Jeff declared: "I reckon we-uns is jest guests, Miss Clara. All I has to do is start a fire in the mornin', an' shake a few cocktails. Nancy, she don't do nothin'."

Jean was surprised at the cocktails. But she saw that they were rigorously administered--especially to Bill and Pinkie.

"All right, you tanks," Chuck would say, "get high--and into the spring you go!"

The big spring, ice-cold, started as a full-sized creek--and Chuck was big enough to carry out his threat. Neither Bill nor Pinkie 'got high'.

There were plenty of other things to do, however--long hikes, sunrises and sunsets to be watched, lazy hours in mid-afternoon when everybody slept or lolled about the camp. And at night there was the big campfire, with singing, storytelling, and Pinkie's clowning.

He was always doing that, however--in a feverish effort to keep from thinking, it seemed to Jean. He began to shower mock-romantic attentions on Carolyn--kept her laughing most of the time; and at any moment he was likely to start shouting--in a raucous, super-dramatic voice--a bloodthirsty or weepy ballad. He knew three of them--"Lasca" and two of the Service ones--which he kept repeating over and over. Finally Chuck and Bill resorted to heroic measures--pounced on Pinkie the moment he started one, and choked him to silence.

Pantomime was his specialty, however. One morning he saw a hawk circling the camp--snatched a blanket and scurried around, like an excited hen, shouting "Squ-hawk!--squ-hawk!" Then he stole his aunt's corset--she had left it in the tent--and did a ludicrous imitation of "Milady dresses for Dinner". And immediately afterwards he fell into the creek--got up shouting: "I've started a new religion, Aunt Clara! I've invented self-baptism!"

Jean recognized that as a jibe as hers and Chuck's discussions of religion. Those had developed into arguments, for Jean had refused to accept his iconoclasm without questioning it. She maintained, for one thing, that the Church has always practiced social service--which he had said it was beginning to adopt, because dogmatic religion was breaking down.

"Sure it's practiced it--just as the English nobility and gentry did, by giving hand-outs to the peasantry on Christmas and other feast-days," he smiled. "The point is, Jean, that the Church has followed--it has not led.

Did it do anything during the Industrial Revolution in England--except to say that God had ordained poverty, in order that the masses might labor and produce for the aristocracy?"

She said: "I don't know--did it?"

"Not as an organization--individuals did. The Nonconformists put up a howl; but they were mostly the masses--lacked leadership, and had no money. What could they do--except protest?"

"Haven't the Protestants been 'protesting' for quite a while?"

He smiled: "Sure--but not about social injustice. The ones that held the purse-strings wouldn't let 'em do that. Your Southern Baptist Convention split with the Northern one over Slavery--and they're still split. And your Protestants, Jean, are just as dogma-bound as my Episcopalians, or the Roman Catholics. The only real difference between any of 'em is dogma."

"Heavens! Aren't the Episcopalians Protestants? They say they are."

"They 'protested'--because Henry the Eighth wanted to marry Ann Bolyn!"

Jean laughed: "Maybe that was against 'social injustice', Chuck!"

II

Thursday at noon--they had arrived on Monday--Pinkie said to Jean: "How's for that talkie-talk you promised me, kid?"

She said: "I thought you'd forgotten it, Pinkie."

"Not me. How about anclin' up to the top of the mountain?"

"Aren't you afraid I'll preach you a sermon?"

"I've heard the 'sermon in stones'--you tell me about the 'good in everything'!"

He had said that he was 'no good'--and she had meant to argue that there is good in everybody....She wondered if he was laughing at her. But she had suggested the talk....

As they started up the mountain, Chuck said: "That Holstein bull might have ideas about your shirt, Pinkie." He wore a red shirt that almost flamed.

Pinkie jeered: "Maybe we should carry us a tree to climb, Grandpa!" He dropped on his hands and knees, wagged his head and snorted: "The bull that walked like a man!"

Jean said: "Pinkie, if you had a tail, you'd be --a lovely calf!"

He chased her to the barbed-wire fence, and they crawled under it. He kept clowning--Jean had to laugh at him. His dead-pan, freckled face and red hair were amusing, even without the antics. They followed the fence, which inclosed the bare mountain top, to the path which led to the summit--which was visible from the camp.

But Pinkie said: "I saw a view once. Let's follow the fence, kid."

"Why, Pinkie?"

"I want to see if that hick left me my moonshine."

"Pinkie--I thought you were going to stop that!"

"Who said so?"

"You mean--you're going to drink it?"

"No, I'm just goin' to see if it's there--an' dump it.
Cross my heart an' hope to die!"

"Why not just leave it there?"

"Maybe it isn't--an' I'm out ten bucks."

"I won't go with you, Pinkie."

"Just wait for me, then--on top o' this hunk o' scenery."

Jean hesitated. "I'm afraid of the bull," she confessed.
But she was more afraid Pinkie would drink some of the whiskey
She said: "I'll go back to camp."

"Haven't you any faith in me?"

Maybe he was trying to test her faith....

She said: "All right--I'll go with you."

"Thatta gal!" He hooked his arm in hers. "I knew you
were a sport, kid--if you'd just be yourself."

She said: "Pinkie, I do have faith in you. You're
intelligent; and you're one of the most likable persons I've
ever known, when you want to be."

"Sure--the ol' Personality Kid himself," he agreed.

"But you're bitter about--about your father and mother,"
she hesitated. "That's what I wanted to talk to you about."

He grinned: "I had a blighted youth, kid. I forgot to
tell you that Ma used to stick needles in me--an' Dad
knocked one eye out!"

"So--all that was a lie!"

"Certainly not, my love. The saps that teach English
call it 'creative fiction'."

"You've just been making fun of me!" she cried.

"Everything you've said has been a lie. And--you're simply

killing every good thing about you with that cheap cynicism!"

They had reached the gate where the trail first crossed the fence. Pinkie said: "Let's see--six posts up. Come on, kid. I'll let you dump it yourself."

He had meant to dump it after all!

She said: "Bring it down here. I don't want to snag my stockings in that brush."

He returned with the jug, held it out to her. "Dump a slug o' that down your esophagus, kid--it's goin' to be a long, hard winter!"

Jean flashed: "Pinkie! There isn't a spark of truth in you!" She turned and started back toward the camp.

He swung the jug to his mouth, gulped the fiery stuff and coughed. "So the dame walked out on 'im--just like that!" he exclaimed. Then he caught up with Jean, grasped her arms from behind and jerked her around.

"You asked for it!" he grated. "You're one dame that's goin' to be warmed up--right now!"

Jean struggled in his arms. "Pinkie--I'll scream!"

She was no weakling; he panted: "Some do--at first--"

She screamed, "Help!" three or four times. Then he sat down and pulled her into his lap. The girl threw herself out of it, and he pinioned her arms as she lay on her back.

"Pinkie!" she gasped. "They'll -- lynch you for this!"

"She felt his hot, whiskey breath on her face--heard him mutter, "God!" Then he let her up.

"Don't tell anybody!" he begged. "I'm crazy-drunk! For God's sake--don't tell anybody!"

She slapped his face: "You're a beast!"

"No--I'm drunk! I stole the cocktail gin--it makes me this way, Jean. Honest to God--I'm sorry!"

Jean heard Chuck shout from the slope above them: "Hey! What's the matter down there?"

Pinkie picked up the jug and ran down the trail, disappeared in the scrub oak. Chuck hurried down the mountain. "What's the matter?" he asked Jean.

Then he saw her blood-drained face. "Did he--?"

She said: "He's drunk. He--just pawed me."

Chuck rasped: "The dirty skunk! I'd like to wring his damned neck!"

III

Mrs. Ainsworth had discovered Pinkie's theft of the gin, and had sent Chuck after them. "He's a dippomaniac--he ought to be in an institution," Chuck told Jean. "We've dosed him with cocktails up here, to keep him from going off his nut. Mother hoped we might help him get hold of himself."

Jean told me about the jug. "He promised to pour it out," she added. "But he didn't."

"He couldn't--he hasn't the will-power. Mother and I are to blame for letting you into this mess, Jean."

"No, you aren't," she denied. "I was a silly little fool. I thought I could--talk to him."

"We didn't bring you up here to regenerate him, though. And Mother will be broken up about it. I'm damned sorry it happened too--that you had to go through with a thing like that."

"None of you are to blame," she said. "What will Pinkie do now, Chuck?"

"He'll take Bill's car--he has a key to it--and go back to Boonville, I suppose. That is--if he doesn't break his damned neck before he gets there."

Mrs. Ainsworth insisted that she and Chuck follow Pinkie immediately, and Jean wanted to go too. When Pinkie came back to Boonville alone and drunk, the town would conjecture the worst possible explanation, she realized.....He might even brag about it. Mary would hear about it anyway--and Sam, eventually....

The others decided to go too. Leaving Jeff and Nancy to pack what they could not carry, they started down the mountain. At the foot of the mountain Chuck arranged with the farmer to go back with his pack-horse.

"That young sprout was shore higher'n a kite--yellin' an' singin' jest like he'd got religion," the man said. "He jumped into that yaller cyar an' lit out down the road--lickety-split! I reckon he's a-flyin' by this time."

On the road to Boonville they expected to find Pinkie and the roadster smashed against a tree or rail-fence; but through the miracle which sometimes happens to drunken drivers, he had reached town. The yellow car was in front of the post office.

As they drove up the street, Jean saw the crowd--Pinkie had been hurt after all! People surged around the Ainsworth car as it stopped. They were shouting and gesticulating.

Jean caught the words: "Sam Baron's killed that Santerre feller!"

Dr. Boone pushed his way through the crowd. "Git that gal home!" he told Chuck.

Judson had heard the news, had gone home to tell Mary. They met the car at the street steps. Dr. Boone had stood on the running board. "She's fainted--git 'er into the house," he said. Chuck carried Jean into the house. Mary stopped wringing her hands and followed him, showed him to Jean's room.

As Dr. Boone gave the girl a restorative, Mrs. Ainsworth came to the doorway. She said quietly: "Jean will be all right, Mrs. Taylor. It's just shock."

Mary turned, her eyes blazing accusation. "You said you'd look after my child--an' you've led 'er to degradation an' misery! It's a judgment of Almighty God on me--for listenin' to your smooth palaver about daincin' an' cyard-playin'!"

Mrs. Ainsworth murmured: "I'm sorry," and went back to the car. Chuck saw that she was crying....

Jean began to revive. She sat up--stared wildly at the doctor. "Dr. Boone--did he?" she cried.

"Take it easy, honey," he tried to soothe her. "He'll be all right. They can't do a thing to 'im."

Mary said: "They'll hang Sam Baron--he's done murder!"

Dr. Boone glared at her: "Mary--you shet up!" he shouted. "You Haven't the brains of a piss-ant!"

Jean began to sob. Judson shuffled his feet in agonized helplessness. Mary glared at the doctor--turned and went into the living room.

"I'll jest give you a hypodermic, honey," Dr. Boone muttered, fumbling in his medicine case. When he had done so,

he joined Mary in the living room.

He said: "Dam' it--git a hold o' yourself, Mary! She's your child. Do you want to drive 'er mad?"

"She might as well be dead, John Boone! She's ruined--she can never look this town in the face again!"

"Dam' this town--to everlastin' Hell!" he grated. "I'll git 'er out of it! An' you can't stop me, Mary--you jest try to!"

IV

Dr. Boone had witnessed the killing. "Was it over 'Genie?" Judson asked him a few minutes later.

The doctor admitted that it had been. "I was in the drug store, talkin' to Wigginhorn," he said. "Young Baron an' Chet an' Kate Bradley were at the soda fountain--when that Santerre feller come roarin' over Little Mountain with his motor wide open. He skidded to a stop in front o' the post office--scatterin' that flock o' side-walk sitters like a flock o' scared chickens...."

Pinkie had got out of the car--had leered at the gaping 'sitters'.. "Any of you hicks know Jean Taylor?" he had asked.

Sam Baron--he had quit his job and had returned to Boonville after his telephone quarrel with Jean--had gone to the drug-store door.

He had said: "Sure, I know Jean. What about her?"

Pinkie had staggered up to him, had grasped Sam's shirt-front. "You'd be surprised!" he had leered. "If you ask me--an' I know, mister!--she's plenty-hot stuff!"

"Young Baron hit 'im then," Dr. Boone told Judson. "knocked 'im off the sidewalk between the two buildin's.

The feller's head struck one o' them empty gas cylinders Wigginhorn uses in his soda fountain--an' smashed like an egg shell. He died before we could git 'im to the Riddle Hotel.

"Chet Bradley an' his wife drove off with young Baron. I hear he's left town."

Judson said: "Manslaughter, I reckon--but 'Genie's name will be dragged into it, Doc. They'll call 'er as a witness, to establish motive. An' it'll jast about kill 'er, too."

"No, they won't call 'er; she'll be too sick to testify--if my affidavit's any good," the doctor stated. "But--I'm a-goin' to see Chet Bradley."

Chet, however, had needed no suggestions. He told Dr. Boone that Sam was on his way to the Tennessee line. "Sam knows those folks have got money," Chet said. "An' he's pretty scared about this killin'. He was mad about Jean's goin' with 'em on that trip; he boasted this mornin' that he was goin' to lick the whole works."

"Kate an' me tried to talk him out of it; an' Kate tried to git 'im to send word to Jean before he left--but he wouldn't. I give 'im some money--he already had some--an' he took my ol' car an' headed for Morristown. From there he'll take a train to New York an' pick up a job on a cattle boat goin' to Europe."

The doctor grunted appreciatively. "You done right. There won't be a trial--unless they ketch him. An' they won't do that, I reckon."

He went back to the Taylors'. Jean was still asleep, under the influence of the hypodermic he had given her. Kate was with her. The doctor called Judson and Mary into the

kitchen and told them what he had learned from Chet.

He said: "The thing to do now is to git 'Genie away from here."

"Well, she can jest go to Ransome's," Mary said. "Jud Taylor, you go right down there to that telephone an' send Ransome a telegram that she's a-comin'!"

"That's no place for her," the doctor stated. "Jud an' me'll attend to the telegram, Mary."

"John Boone, you can't come into my house an'---"

He said: "I'm thinkin' of the gal, Mary. An' Jud an' me'll do what's best for her--even if you haven't got brains enough to."

But he refused to say what they would do, and neither would discuss the matter with her. Mary quit speaking to either of them...

Somehow, Jean managed to live through the next few days. Kate stayed with her most of the time; and Dr. Boone, despite Mary's looks and sniffs, almost lived at the Taylors'. He knew Mary's reasoning--that Jean had 'sinned' and was paying the penalty for it; that she, Mary, would be 'sinning' if she interfered with God's will. And Judson, almost sick with worry himself, was helpless and bewildered....

"The Ainsworths asked about you, 'Genie,'" Dr. Boone told her. "They'd come up to see you, but they know your ma wouldn't let 'em in."

Jean murmured: "I don't want to see them--ever...."

The gossip-vultures stalked up and down the street, gathered in knots on the sidewalk--even came and stood in

the yard. People came to the back door, ostensibly to borrow things; others brazenly attempted to call--when they had never done so before. Mary sent them away, with a venomous 'piece of her mind'. But Jean knew what they were thinking...

Phronie and Alex came over from Burnsville; and the sisters wept vociferously on each other's shoulders--consoled each other over the degradation of their daughters...But Trixie, Jean thought bitterly, had been 'saved' by her marriage. For her, Jean, there was no 'salvation'. Pinkie was dead.....Sam had killed him.....And Sam was gone....

CHAPTER XIII

I

Professor Starke had Reverend Ponder came to see Jean, but neither had anything to offer except that she trust in God....Jean had trusted in Him--and He had let Sam kill Pinkie....God had done nothing, she thought; He would do nothing now....So far as she could see, God had never meddled in the affairs of human beings....

He had not even saved Christ from the cross....People said that He had given His Son as an 'atonement'....For what? For the infantile 'Original Sin' of eating the apple--or for the ignorance which He had been indifferent to?

All that Chuck Ainsworth had said--all Dr. Boone had said--came back to her: that all religions are explanations, evolved by thinkers in terms of their racial culture--developed in mental self-defense; that the explanations are pounced upon by the masses, incapable of working out their own, and are frozen into patterns of dogma and ritual; that these

patterns are perpetuated and kept inviolate by a crafty-- or ignorant--priesthood, who are parasites, feeding on the ignorance, fear, superstitions, and credulity of the masses.

At first Jean had accepted those assumptions as academic; she had believed in the essential justice of God and the rightness of human existence. But now her world, the only one she knew, had crumbled around her; and its dissolution had left her bewildered--mentally stunned. There was nothing she could cling to and say: "This is the truth--this will not change--this will not fail me."

She could not see the answer to her own question: "Where does God come in?" She could not see that He comes in anywhere. People, it seemed to Jean, are just creatures--grasshoppers--hunks of animated matter living on a bigger hunk of matter, drifting purposelessly through time and space....

Not that she wanted to think about such things. Actually, she shrank mentally from thinking about anything; but a childhood without companionship had forced her to adopt the introvert's twin defense mechanisms, daydreams and introspection; now the patterns shaped themselves in spite of her--writhed and twisted snake-like through the stream of her consciousness....

There was no God....She was just a grasshopper....

II

A few days later--they would always remain a nightmare of horror to Jean--a mud-splattered car stopped in front of the Taylors'. It was almost supper time; Judson hurried out to meet the man who was coming up the walk. He was a stranger to Jean. She saw him and Judson shake hands--noticed that he was older than Judson.

Then the thought flashed through her mind that he had come about Sam--that Sam had been arrested. She stood up, waited for them to come in.

Judson said: "'Genie, this is your Uncle Sam Taylor."

Sam said: "Howdy, 'Genie. I've got a gal jest about your age--back in Montana. You're goin' back with me to see her."

Jean took his outstretched hand--saw Mary standing in the kitchen doorway. Mary came into the living room, stared grimly at Sam. He said: "Howdy, Mary. It's been nigh onto fifty year', I reckon--"

She ignored his hand. "You'll not take my child into that woman's house!" she blazed. "If you do--it'll be over my dead body!"

"Then--it'll be over it!" Judson cried. "She's a-goin'--to somebody that'll have the heart to look after 'er!"

Mary turned to Jean: "'Genie Taylor--are you a-goin'?"

~~The girl~~ The girl was close to hysteria. "Yes--yes, I am, Mamma! I--have to get away from here!"

Mary's were the tones of cold fury. "Then--I pray to God I may never lay eyes on you again!"

She went into the kitchen, slammed the door.

Jean begged: "Papa--let's go over to Kate's! I just--just can't stand any more of it!"

Judson said: "I never thought to see the day when--when my own brother."

Sam had stood through Mary's outburst without change of expression. Now he said quietly: "Never mind, Jud. Mary'll come around--we've got the gal to think of."

"The Bradleys live on Carter Hill--I reckon you remember it," Judson said as they drove down the street.

"Yes, we turn right here--where Jess Jenkins used to live."

"Yes--Ol' Jess is dead now," Judson said. "Been dead nigh onto twenty year', Sam."

"Is John Boone?"

"No, he's still here--still doctorin' people. You'll want to see Doc, before you go back."

Sam chuckled: "Wouldn't miss seein' the ol' hellion for a bank! Lord--lord! John Boone must be close to seventy. Yes, he is--he's older'n I am."

Jean asked: "You didn't drive all the way from Montana alone, did you, Uncle Sam?"

"No, honey. I had a feller drive us--left 'im in Asheville. I could a-done it though, but Sally jest wouldn't listen to it. She's in Asheville, Jud."

Sally had come with Sam--they had both come, Judson thought. And now--he couldn't even welcome them to his own home....

"She's a fine woman," he muttered. "I want a chance to shake 'er hand."

"You'll git it, Jud," Sam promised. "She'll look after 'Genie, jest like she was her own daughter. An' she'll be mighty glad to git the chance."

Dr. Boone heard that they had gone to the Bradleys'. Everybody in Boonville knew it before morning, and surmised the reason, of course, The doctor drove over there himself after supper and renewed his acquaintance with Sam.

"Dang my rotten ol' duodenum!" he shouted, "you've got to spend the night with me. An' I reckon we'll still be a-yarnin' when them roosters start crowin' for day!"

Kate went back with Jean and Judson, to help pack the girl's things. Jean remembered that Judson and Mary would be alone in the old house when she was gone, and the thought made her heartsick....Hermmother--stewing in her own blind, stubborn bitterness.... Judson-- alone with her....

On the way home she murmured: "Papa--I just can't go! I--just can't leave you..."

He said, more confidently than he felt: "We'll manage, honey. Mary will come around. Don't you worry about us, 'Genie."

Jean had to accept that. She knew she had to get away from Boonville--from Mary--or go completely insane....

When they reached home, Mary had gone to bed--and was asleep! In the living room they could hear her snoring. But neither Judson nor Jean would sleep that night. The gulf of Mary's separation from them was measured by the fact that she could do so....

After Kate had helped Jean pack and had gone home, Judson and the girl went into the kitchen. There he told her something she had not known before--that he had gone West with Sam, that he had turned back, that he had taken his hands from the plow of opportunity....

"I reckon I was afraid of the West," he admitted. "But I saw it through Mary's eyes....I knew I'd have to give 'er up if I stayed...An' I loved your mother, honey....

"Not that I'm blamin' her....But I could have done

better. The work I've done here--many another man could a-done it....I jest didn't grow, 'Genie. I elected to stay... where nothin' grows....

"But I want you to, 'Genie!" he exclaimed. "I want you to be--the woman you can be. I want you to learn the things I didn't learn--to do the things I didn't do....I've wanted that, ever since you were born. An' I've felt you could--when the other children couldn't....

"Honey, I want you to...make up for my failure...."

"No--you can't say that!" she exclaimed. "You're not a failure, Papa. Nobody else could have done what you've done here--the way you've done it. Why do you think they've been re-electing you, all these years? The whole county comes to you for help; they all love and respect you. You--just know they do!"

"I reckon they do," he admitted. "Anyway, I've lived my life...an' I can't change it now....I wouldn't change it, if it was to do over again, I reckon. Not if it meant losin' Mary--an' you, 'Genie--an' the other children too, I guess...

"But I've been thinkin' about all this--about what happened last week," he told her. "I believe there's a meanin' behind it. Maybe you needed it, to temper you....A piece o' cast iron can't be tempered, honey. It has to be fine steel; it has to bend--an' spring back. It has to be toughened--in the fires o' experience....

"I was afraid o' them fires...."

Jean made a pot of coffee before daylight; as they drank it, there came a tap on the back door. It was Dr. Boone.

"Sam Taylor's in bed--an' snorin'," he said. "I kinda figgered you two would be still up."

Judson said: "Take a chair, an' have a cup o' coffee, Doc."

He pulled up a chair to the table. "Don't keer if I do, 'Genie--no cream or sugar, honey. You spile good coffee with cream an' sugar....

"An' you spile good people with cream-an'-sugar ideas," he stated. "That's what's wrong with this damned town--with the people in it. They figger God's done all their thinkin' for 'em--when He give 'em brains to do it with themselves... That's what's wrong with Mary in there....

"'Genie, you're gittin' away from here tomorrow--an' it's the best thing that could a-happened to you. God ain't a-goin' to shape your life for you; an' now that you're gittin' away from it, Boonville can't--unless you keep on thinkin' like Boonville.

"You jest remember this, honey--an' check it as you git older, an' see if it ain't right: God ain't a-goin' to do one dam' thing about your life! An' that makes you captain o' your own soul--an' master o' your own destiny!"

He arose, shook his finger at the girl. "An' to start with," he said, "you jest figger, 'Genie, that ninety-nine per cent o' what you've learned in Boonville has been wrong!"

III

Twentyfour hours later Jean was in a Nashville hotel. It was three o'clock in the morning again, but the girl could not sleep. Her stream of consciousness focused like the beams of a spot-light--on Judson and Dr. Boone, as they had

sat with her in the kitchen the night before; as they, with Chet and Kate, had said painfully cheerful good-byes in front of the George Vanderbilt Hotel in Asheville; on Mary, in Boonville, who had grudged a grim "Take keer o' yourself, 'Genie'"--without offering even to shake hands....

Other pictures came, flashing scene-on-scene--like a speeded-up blurred film--the events of her life in Boonville.. They whirled and gyrated into a vortex of mingled images--focused on the bitter, accusing face of Sam Baron....

Sally Taylor came into the room and talked casually for a while, suggested tactfully that Jean take one of the sleeping powders Dr. Boone had given her. The girl did so.. Gradually the pictures and her aunt's soft monotones faded from her consciousness....

Sam and Sally slipped unobtrusively into her life. At first she was barely conscious of them. They demanded nothing of her; they forced nothing upon her; but when they reached Helena, a week later, they had become her anchors to the present.

Jean had never been farther away from home than Asheville before, but the trans-continental trip had given her only a vague feeling--of infinite distances crossed. Space-separation from Boonville helped to engender a mental severance from it--and from her past life. Jean felt that that had stopped when she had heard someone shout: "Sam Baron's killed that Santerre feller!"

The intervening days became a tenuous filament of unreality to her, stretching back over all the miles to

Boonville. But the filament was still supercharged--with memories.

She had seen a mirage as they crossed the Dakota Bad Lands--a house, green trees and fields, shimmering water. As her uncle had explained it, Jean had watched the mirage fade into sun-baked, desert waste-land....Her dreams of happiness with Sam Baron were like that. They were mental mirages--now a desert of reality, mocking her with their emptiness....

She had left Boonville, but she could not escape her own thoughts. They hung over her--black clouds of despondency, of morbid introspection. They dominated her thinking, leaving her mentally helpless--thrusting everything else into the background of her consciousness.

Dr. Boone believed that a change of environment would give Jean a new mental footing--would replace memories and introspection with new interests; but Sally Taylor realized that the girl was hardly conscious of her present environment. A hilarious musical comedy in Chicago--Jean's first one--had drawn no smiles from her, although Sam and Sally had chuckled over it all the way to Minneapolis. And their discussion of their adopted daughter, Edythe--she was Jean's own age--drew only polite, listless questions. When they reached Helena, Edythe was not there--she was camping with friends at Seeley Lake--and Jean seemed to have forgotten that she existed.

Sam and Sally tried to interest her in Helena--the "Last Chance Gulch" of Vigilante days, rich in Montana history and pioneer traditions--but Jean listened politely,

made replies which showed her thoughts were a thousand miles away. Even the Taylor house on Cruse Avenue--"Gold Pan Alley", in the wealthy "West Side" section of Helena--did not interest her. It was a veritable museum of colorful objects which Sam and Sally had collected from all over the world, things Jean had read and dreamed about; but Sally realized that the girl did not even see them now.

She seemed terrified at the thought of meeting people. When the Taylors' friends came in to welcome them back home and to inquire about their trip, Jean went to her room and stayed there until the callers had gone. Sally sensed the reason for that, however.

She said: "We never get the Southern news out here, Jean. Poor Sam complains that he can't even keep track of who's governor of North Carolina. We could subscribe to an Asheville paper though--"

"No!" Jean exclaimed. "Please don't, Aunt Sally--I wish you wouldn't."

But she was no longer afraid to meet people, now that she knew they had not seen her name in headlines--it had not been there, except in her imagination--and she made an effort to be agreeable to her aunt's and uncle's guests. Both Sam and Sally saw that it was an effort, realized that it was good for Jean.

Frequently, however, her Boonville accent called forth comments and questions, and Jean would flush painfully as she answered them. Sally helped her over the embarrassment, until the girl became used to the questions and had stock answers ready for them.

That was the beginning of an adjustment, Sally realized. And Jean's almost pathetic attempts to act naturally and do the things her aunt and uncle would expect of her were obvious. The trouble was that none of those things meant anything to her per se. Even playing the piano had become a painful effort, and it was almost impossible for her to read a book or magazine. Her mind simply refused to focus itself on anything but memories and introspection.

IV

Then Edythe returned from her vacation on Seeley Lake--blew into the house like a miniature tornado. Jean was trying to read a magazine in a corner of the big living room, when the other girl arrived. Edythe ran over to her and shook her hands violently.

"You're Jean--I'm Edythe!" she cried. "You're good-looking, too! Mom--it's a dirty gyp! She'll steal all my boy-friends! Come on upstairs while I take a bath--all the soot and dust from that lousy Garrison stub went right down the back of my neck!"

She ran over and hugged Sally, then dashed to the stairs--started peeling off her clothes and shouting to both Jean and Sally: "How was your trip, Mom--glad to get back? Come on, Jean--I want to talk to you! I missed you just like heck, Mom! Seeley Lake was a forst--not a man there would look at me! Was I humiliated! Come on, Jean!"

She had peeled to stepins and brassiere. "Better go with her, Jean," Sally smiled. "She's likely to drown herself in the shower."

Edythe had wriggled out of the brassiere and was kicking off the step-ins. She bounded up the stairs and into the bath room, still shouting to Jean: "Come on in! I'll dump these clothes down the laundry chute--no, I'd better save the shoes! Talk to me--while I soak off a few layers of Montana!"

The request, however, was purely rhetorical. "I guess we're cousins, or something," she said as she turned on the water. "Ouch!--that's cold! The other must be hot then--ouch! No, it isn't--it's the cold one! I never can remember! The hot one runs cold, and--ouch! No, it doesn't; it just runs cold at first! That always fools me--silly, isn't it? There! Now I've got it!"

Jean had had trouble with the shower--Boonville had never achieved the luxury of a water system. "I almost scalded myself the first time," she said.

"I do that too--yes, we're cousins or something," Edythe went on. "I'm just adopted though. Wouldn't have known it--if some dope up at Hawthorne School hadn't told me. He said Mom an' Dad were too old to have kids. I'd never thought of that--aren't I a sap?"

Jean said: "My father and mother are almost as old, though."

"No, they aren't--Dad says Uncle Jud's almost ten years younger than he is. Gosh--just think! Ten years from now we'll be old maids--or grandmothers, or something! Or at least," she temporized, "I hope I'm through college by that time. It took me five years to get through high school, but I skipped a year in the grades--so I guess I can out even."

I finished high school this year--going to the University next year--where did you go this year?"

"I finished at Corinth College."

Edythe stopped splashing. "Gosh--you must be a genius! Or--well-preserved, or something. How old are you?"

"I'm eighteen--but Corinth isn't really a college," Jean explained. "It's a sort of high school, I guess."

"Oh, that's all right--you'll be a freshman," Edythe said. "You're going with me to the University this fall--aren't you? It's the cutest place you ever saw--stuck right up against a mountain! It's just ducky--lots of places to go walking with your 'secret sorrow'--and there's a new prof over there that's just too cute for words! I met him up at Seeley Lake this summer--he's got red hair--and I've got an awful crush on him!"

"I thought you said your trip up there was a frost."

"It was--he's married!" Edythe declared. "Isn't that--simply putrid?"

CHAPTER XIV

I

Edythe was a mental anodyne to Jean--and a stimulant. The girl's vitality and energy challenged the same qualities in Jean, and Edythe gave no one in her vicinity an opportunity for moping or introspection. Her life was a whirlwind of activity; Jean was swept into the whirlwind, and she entered it willingly, because it offered her an escape from thinking.

Judson had written regularly--Mary, not at all. But his letters had helped Jean to a feeling of normalcy....He and Mary were as well as usual--she was canning peaches--it

had been raining all week.....The routine of her parents' lives had not changed, Jean realized. Vaguely, she felt that its momentum would carry them until Mary had 'come around', as she always did eventually after a clash with Judson....

Then a letter came from Kate and Chet. Jean hurried upstairs with it--tore it open eagerly. It might contain news from Sam....It did--a post card mailed to Chet from New York. It said: "Got here Thursday. Big town--saw a show." It was signed, "Joe Duke", with the line, "Write care Amer. Express, Southampton, Eng."

Jean stared at the familiar handwriting, blinked back the tears....Sam had not written her--but now she could write him....

Edythe came dashing upstairs as she read the letter, saw Jean had been crying and imagined the letter was from Judson and Mary. "I know just how you feel!" she exclaimed. "I get homesick--or something--right here in the house with Mom an' Dad. I think: they can't live always--and then I'll just have nobodI just can't keep from--from bawling!"

She choked back a sob, ran to the bath room and washed away the tears--came back giggling. "Aren't I the silliest thing! Go wash your face, kid--Dad's promised me the Ford truck after dinner. We're taking the gang to Alhambra for a swim!"

Jean did not want to go; she wanted to write a letter to Sam. "I--I can't swim, Edythe," she hesitated. it was true enough; Boonville did not approve of feminine swimming; to Boonville, a woman in a bathing suit was invariably a harlot.

But Edythe merely giggled. "Gosh, I can't either--you

don't have to! You just get into the water--it's warm at Alhambra--and let the boys duck you!"

"But--I haven't a bathing suit! Goodness, Edythe--I've never had one on in my life!"

"What's the difference? I've an extra one--it's yellow, and it'll just set off that black hair of yours! I'll get it--"

Jean had to try it on immediately. Edythe clasped her hands and beamed at the result. "Gosh, you're a knockout, Jean! Just wait till the boys ogle those legs--whoops, my dear!"

Before coming to Helena Jean would have shrunk from submitting herself to male inspection--in a bathing suit. But that was Boonville, she thought....She hated Boonville--everything it stood for. She went on the swimming party and wore the suit brazenly, as a gesture of contempt for Boonville.

But the boys in Edythe's gang did not know that they were as impersonal to her as the swimming pool. No girl her age had ever been indifferent to them, and Jean's looks and manner were challenges to their masculinity--which they accepted by giving her a 'rush'. Jean tried to be friendly; they were Edythe's friends, and she knew the 'rush' was a personal compliment. But she could not hide the fact that they meant nothing to her.

Afterwards one of the boys said: "She's a good-looker, all right--but what the hell? She's colder than the belly of a snake."

That night she wrote Sam Baron, to the address he had given on the card. She would always love him...She would wait

for him always....

Because he had killed Pinkie Santerre, Jean believed that she was bound to Sam forever....

II

It was settled that she was to go with Edythe to the State University at Missoula that fall. When Sally began planning clothes for them, the same quantity and quality for both, Jean protested.

"Papa just couldn't stand all that expense, Aunt Sally," she said. "I can get along with the clothes I have. I don't need any more now, anyway."

Sally smiled. "No, you don't, dear. But Edythe feels she does--we've spoiled her about clothes, I'm afraid. Maybe you'd better talk it over with your Uncle Sam."

Sam did the talking, however. He took Jean into the library and closed the door.

"Now, you look here, honey," he said; "you're Jud's child--my blood-kin. We adopted Edythe--her folks were strangers to us--because we wanted somebody to love, somebody to help us enjoy our home here. Now, why can't we love you too, an' treat you like our own child--like we treat Edythe--when it'll make us mighty happy to do it?"

Jean could not answer. She choked and turned away.

He said: "Jest let Sally buy them dresses, 'Genie--she wants to. You an' Edythe wear 'em --an' break fellers' hearts in 'em, like you're meant to do. Sally an' me'll git our fun out of it. You can jest bet we will."

Jean squeezed his hand--went upstairs and cried away her pent-up emotion. It was not the dresses--although she

liked pretty dresses. Sam and Sally were offering her affection and understanding, the kind Judson had given her; and Mary, her mother, had denied her even the semblance of a mother's love...

Edythe's life was one party after another, it seemed to Jean. At first they were as impersonal to her as pantomimes--tasks which she set herself to go through with. But she could see that Sam and Sally enjoyed them, because Edythe did.

One of the parties was a pre-season sorority 'rush' affair. As guests Edythe and Jean were made over considerably. Jean knew nothing about sororities, except that their members wore pins. She asked Edythe what all the fuss and flutter was about.

Edythe giggled. "Oh, we're important! Haven't you heard about us? We rate, Jean--we're Somebody!"

Jean smiled. "Heavens--what's happened to us? I thought we were--just people."

"Dad and Mom are pioneers though, and they've got a little money," Edythe explained. "This is the darndest town you ever saw. Everybody in it's rich--or has been--or is trying to get that way!"

"But this rushing is pure eye-wash," she declared. "It makes 'em feel important to do it--lets 'em show off their little pins--that are just little sign-boards that the wearers are 'Somebody'! Gosh, they work hard at it--don't they?"

"Yes, you'd think people went to college just to join a sorority."

"Good grief--they do!" Edythe assured her. "Hundreds

of 'em do. Helen Banks--she's the blonde dame that went with us to Alhambra--didn't get into the sorority she wanted to last fall; so she just packed up and came back home. She didn't even wait to flunk!"

"Which one was that?"

"There's only one--to hear 'em talk! The one that's after us, of course! The Iota Iota Iota Sorority was founded nine hundred years before Christ--and ever since, its members have been just too sweet to stink!"

Jean laughed. "Is Mrs. Skelly one of them?" she asked.

"Yes--did you hear her mincing about them last night? 'My dears', she dripped, 'to wear our simple gold scarab, with its clasped hands, is the epiphany of social distinction'. She said 'epiphany'--so help me Pete! And I had to bite a hunk out of the mantle to keep from choking!"

Jean giggled. "I missed that," she said. "Are you going to join them, Edythe?"

"Mom wants me to join one of 'em. She says to look them over, though. Are you going to?"

"They may not want me."

"Nuts--you're Dad and Mom's niece, and you're a good student. Most of that bunch are nit-wits like me; so they have to get a few good ones to keep up their average."

"I think I'll talk to Aunt Sally about it, though," Jean said. "If she wants you to join one, there must be some good in them."

Sally thought there was much good in them--along with much snobbishness. Edythe could see only the snobbishness.

"Why do we have to run with a bunch of saps like that,

Mom?" she asked. "We don't need an Iota pin to hide behind--for Pete's sake!"

"No, you don't, dear," Sally smiled. "So you feel superior to the ones who do. Isn't that snobbishness?"

Edythe stared at her. "I don't get it, Mom."

"The point is that you and Jean don't have to be snobs," Sally told her. "So you can try to understand and sympathize with the ones who do have to be."

"Why does anybody have to be?"

"Because they feel inferior. Snobbishness is an instinctive gesture of self-protection, dear. The snobs try to hide their inferiority from themselves and from others. And the easiest way to do that is to cloak themselves with names and emblems that symbolize what the snobs want to be."

"For Pete's sake!" Edythe murmured.

Jean said: "Some of 'em just imitate, though."

"Most people do that," Sally told her. "If you choose a group that is led by snobs, most of its members will follow their leadership."

Edythe asked: "Why do we have to choose any of 'em? Why can't we just live at one of the dorms and be 'barbs'? I'd rather do that. Hadn't you, Jean?"

Jean murmured: "I don't know. Who are the 'barbs'?"

"They're the ones that don't want to join a sorority or fraternity--or don't get a chance to."

"So they use the name 'Barbarians'," Sally smiled. "The ones who don't want to join a club feel superior, and those who don't get asked to feel humiliated--and inferior."

I think you'll find as much snobbishness outside your sororities and fraternities as inside them. And I think you'll find more who are intelligent enough not to be snobs inside the organizations."

Edythe asked: "Why is that, Mom?"

"Because such groups are selective," Sally told her. "They may be superficially so--or they may not be. Anyway, dear, all of us choose our associates when we can...."

She paused for a moment; her thoughts went back through the years....

"We can be lone-wolves," she said. "I've been one.... And I've longed for the pack--even when there were a few coyotes in it...."

Jean looked at her aunt--actually began to see the woman for the first time....

III

The girl could see things now, for she had achieved a mental adjustment. She had been faced with two possible ones: a working acceptance of life as she found it; or insanity, a complete escape from unpleasant reality. The conviction that Sam Baron's life was linked by destiny with her own had become an obsession with her. Jean's adjustment--it was actually an escape--was the conviction that Sam would come back to her.

She might have to wait years for him to come--but she would make the most of them. She would learn all she could. She would be ready for the Happy Ending....It was Fundamentalist Predestination rationalized into a defense mechanism.

It gave the girl's life a purpose and a meaning she could accept....

As she gradually became conscious of her aunt and uncle as distinct personalities, Jean came to realize that they were alike in many respects. Their calm assurance fascinated her, for she could see that it was not merely the complacency of ignorance and indifference. Their library, a far more comprehensive one than Corinth had boasted, contained books dealing with everything from cattle breeding to geopolitics; and Jean could see that the books had been read by Sam and Sally. They had used the books as vehicles to independent thinking.

Jean noticed, too, that they discussed local, national, and world institutions as they might have talked about a lawn mower--considered them tools to perform specified services. And both Sam and Sally, she realized, had a wealth of background information about such things as the home, education, religion, government, and the economic system--about their history, purposes, and how they function in human society. Obviously, Sam and Sally considered the latter five also as man-made tools, and not as ends in themselves.

"Yes, we're booked for another World War--more growin' pains," Sam said one afternoon. "The common man has got his fingers in the pie, an' he'll keep 'em there. But we'll work it out, I reckon. The common man ain't what he used to be. Give him a chance, an' he'll be jest like the rest of us."

Sally said: "Let's hope he'll be smarter than the rest of us. We haven't done much to convince him he's going to

need us; we've just trained him to envy our larger share of the pie. And if he isn't smart enough to see he needs us, he may say, 'Let 'em eat cake'."

"The common man ain't no fool, though," Sam said.

"He knows that fellers like Henry Ford an' Edison don't grow on every bush. An' he knows that our economic system, with all its faults, has given him more than he ever had before. It's made possible for him a whole lot more than that--the highest standard o' livin' in the world's history. I figger he'll want to use the brains that's done that, an' will have sense enough to concentrate on the real monkey wrench in the machinery--distribution of what we can produce."

Jean had always thought of 'distribution' as 'transportation'. She asked: "What's wrong with that, Uncle Sam?"

"It depends on buyin' power--on wages, salaries, an' other kinds of income," he told her. "They determine a man's--or a family's--ability touse the things we can produce. An' with mass-production we have to have mass-consumption, or the whole system falls falt."

Jean asked: "Aren't we the richest country in the world?"

"Yes, but some have a lot more buyin' power than they can use--Sally an' me have, I reckon," he said. "An' others haven't enough. They're the common man, the workin' man--that's got his fingers in the pie an' wants more. In other words, 'Genie, he wants a better standard o' livin'--an' you can't blame him."

"How can he get one?"

"There are several ways: His employers can give him

more wages; or the government--that's all of us--can give his kids free schools, free medical attention, better homes to live in--things like that--an' he'll have more of his wages to spend on the rest; or--we can jest quit producin' for a profit an' go socialist, as Russia has."

Jean murmured: "Goodness, I thought--"

Edythe giggled. "You thought like me--that the Russians all had horns and a tail!" she said. "But Mom told me about them--and they haven't. They're just people--trying to get along, like the rest of us. Tell her about 'em, Mom."

"You tell her, dear."

Edythe was nothing loath. "Well, people have always had to make a living--or starve to death--unless somebody did it for 'em--like Mom an' Dad have done for me!" She giggled again. "But that's all right--it's one of the functions of the family, and I'm their family. And I'm going to get married myself--and be 'biological' and 'protective'--all those things! Gosh, it's going to be fun!"

"Where was I? Oh, yes--'making a living'. People found it was easier to work together doing that--or to organize the work, and make somebody else do it! Anyway--the system they use is 'an economic system'. Get it? Not 'the economic system'. There have been thousands--haven't there, Mom?"

"Yes, dear--go on."

"Yes--and each one is just something man invented to do a job," Edythe stated. "He invented a lot of other things too, to do other jobs--the home and marriage, religion, schools, all those things. But the economic system--Capitalism

or what have you?--is supposed to give us all the best possible standard of living. Simple, isn't it?"

"Yes--when you explain it that way," Jean admitted.

"But what about Russia--and Communism?"

"Heck--it's just another system!" Edythe exclaimed.

"Instead of letting Tom, Dick, and Harry manufacture things for profit--and letting Chester, Alonzo, and Ignatz distribute them for more profit--the Russian government has taken over the natural resources, the machinery for production, and the job of distribution. They're trying to give everybody over there a better standard of living--instead of just a few! It doesn't depend on money; the standard of living's just limited by what they can produce. And--I think it's a marvelous idea!"

Jean said: "Heavens--where did you learn all that, Edythe? In school?"

"Gosh, I didn't learn it--I just inherited it!" Edythe told her. "Mom and Dad have talked about stuff like that--ever since I wore diapers. They think I ought to know something about the world I'm living in--and I do! It's a swell world--people are 'moral' and 'creative' and 'acquisitive'! And they have 'biological impulses' and 'inhibitions'--and everything!"

"People are--simply the berries, Jean!"

IV

The girl could see that her aunt's and uncle's assurance--and Edythe's--came from knowledge....Jean set about acquiring knowledge...For the next four years the task was her chief purpose. And she found that the questions which Boon-

ville and Corinth answered by saying, "God just make it so" had been pondered by the world's thinkers down through the ages. She found that the thinkers had achieved hundreds of answers; yet Boonville and Corinth--the Christian religion, as she knew it--had ignored all explanations except those of the primitive Hebrews.

She took all the science she could at the University--and found that science is an orderly, patient, persistent method of finding out the truth. But the Church still condemned science, she realized....A man in Tennessee was arrested for teaching evolution. William Jennings Bryan and Clarence Darrow argued the case, in their shirt sleeves; and even the Montana newspapers headlined the trial. Dozens of magazines sneered at the "Fundamentalism" which had prompted it.

Jean's sociology teacher, Dr. Cox, smilingly inquired if she were a Fundamentalist. The girl flushed and bit her lip.

"If there's anything in the world I hate," she said, "it's that!"

"Sounds interesting," he grinned. "How would you like to write me a term paper on social evolution?"

Jean was eager to write it. She practically lived the topic for the next six weeks--read everything she could find in the library about it. When she had completed the paper, Dr. Cox read it to the class. Jean had written:

"If any one living today had been left alone at birth on a desert island, if he had been suckled by a she-wolf like Romulus and Remus, and if he had grown to maturity

without contacting another human being, he would be more primitive in his way of living--in his thinking--than the lowest Australian bushman. His social concepts would be those of the she-wolf that suckled him; his language would be barks, whimperings, and snarls; he would be without fire, clothing, implements or weapons--without right or wrong--without God....

"He would lack all those things, even if he had the brain of a genius; and his race would perish when he died; for alone he could not reproduce his species.

"But let us send him someone to play Eve to his Adam--and we have the beginnings of a society, of an island civilization. He and his Eve would learn through trial-and-error, with infinite slowness; and each new generation would learn a little more. They would have to learn, in order to survive. Only the fit would survive--by learning to adapt themselves to their island environment. Thus, by transmission from generation to generation, they would build up a body of group-knowledge--a culture--a civilization.

"And just as the differentiation of the sexes for better reproduction--a division of labor--was the first step up life's long ladder of evolution, the association of two or more individuals to satisfy the blind racial urge for reproduction was the beginning of human society. In the smoke-blackened caves of our prehistoric ancestors we find the beginnings of every social device which has enabled man to climb above the beast-level--the family, government, morals and ethics, religion, education, the idea of a co-operative economy, and all the rest...."

When he had finished reading the paper, Dr. Cox said: "That's mighty good writing, Miss Taylor, You certainly show that science and history have refuted Fundamentalism...."

He looked at her for a moment, and asked: "Have you given the Fundamentalists anything to take the place of their dogmas?"

"I've given them the truth--everything that science has proved," she said. "But they don't want that. They just cling to the old myths, Doctor--and try to force them on the rest of us."

Dr. Cox smiled: "No, you haven't given them anything," he assured her. "You've merely offered them the explanations of science--without giving them the cultural background they need to accept those explanations. And by doing so, Miss Taylor, you menace the mental security of the Fundamentalists. People have been burned at the stake for less."

"I see," Jean murmured. "And Communism--any kind of collectivism--menaces the idea of Capitalism...."

"Exactly! And people simply won't take any new 'ism'--anything new--until they feel a need for it. They have to be shown that--an automobile is better than a buckboard!"

Jean might hate Boonville; she might try to refute it--and did refute much of it. But she still clung to the part of it she needed. She could understand how man has made his own deities, as personified explanations of his questions; she could see how his gods were born of fear, superstition, and ignorance; but she still needed a God who meddles in human affairs--even an anthropomorphic one--to make Sam

Baron come back to her.....

CHAPTER XV

I

Jean majored at the University in public school music, with minors in English and sociology. Before graduation she signed a contract to teach the following year--music, and whatever else might be necessary--at Sleeping Child, a small town up the Bitter Root Valley, above Missoula. Edythe took a degree in business administration, and Sam got her a job in one of the Helena banks.

But Jean knew that Edythe would marry in a year or two. She would have a home of her own--a husband who loved her--children....

And Jean knew now that she must gather up the threads of her own life--alone....

The realization had been forced upon her. Sam Baron had not answered the letter she had written him before entering the University; during her four years there she had received no word from him except an occasional post card forwarded by Kate and Chet, and none of them had mentioned her. Sam had been in the Merchant Marine; the cards had come from all parts of the world. But they had stopped; the last one to Chet had given no holding address.

But Jean did not believe that she was released from her obligation to him. The Calvinistic predestination which she had refuted in religion made her believe--utterly--that she could never love any man except Sam....It made her feel that she must wait for him--always, if necessary--as an atonement, ordained by a grim, malicious, Destiny....

Nor had Mary written her. She had not cared, even, to send a message in Judson's letter when Jean was graduated. And for the past four years Sally Taylor--whom Mary had sneered at as the daughter of a saloon keeper all Jean's life--had demonstrated to the girl what a mother could mean to her child....

But her life had to be lived, Jean thought--cold and lonely though it would be, barren of everything that could make it worth living...In her psychology courses she had studied 'sublimation'. She would 'sublimate' her dreams of personal happiness, she told herself; she could bring understanding and happiness to the lives of thousands--and that would be her 'atonement'....

But the thought was a pale consolation. Jean was young and vital. Although she felt that she had lived a lifetime, she was only twenty-two years old....

Sam could have got her a place in the Helena schools, but Sally advised against his doing so. "We'll be a prop for her to lean on," she said; "and Jean doesn't need one now. What the poor child does need is to be swept back into the current of life. She needs a man, Sam."

"She don't seem interested in men, though."

Jean had had plenty of dates at the University, but no 'crushes'. Edythe had had a new 'secret sorrow' every few weeks, sometimes two or three simultaneously.

"She is interested in men--and doesn't know it," Sally stated. "That's why I said 'swept'. I wasn't interested in men--or so I thought--until you came along that night, my dear

Sam chuckled. "We both knew what we wanted, I reckon--but 'Genie's no fool. Edythe says them profs over at Missouls think she's pretty smart."

Sally said: "She is--about everything except herself. The girl's obsession-ridden; she has been ever since she came here. And she know she is--knows what obsessions are and how they work. But she can't give this one up until she gets something--another man--to replace it."

"An' the man, I reckon, will have to make 'er realize she's a woman--an' not jest a mind," he said thoughtfully.

II

Sam and Sally drove Jean to Missoula before her school started. Edythe would have accompanied them, but she was working at the bank. From Missoula Jean took the "Woodtick Special" up the Bitter Root; she reached Sleeping Child at dusk, was directed to the Landers Hotel. It was merely a big, dilapidated house--with a sign, "Rooms and Transents". Jean learned later that the 'Transents' also occupied rooms temporarily.

Mrs. Landers, a droop-mouthed slattern, said that she also served meals. "I jest started last week," she confided. "There wasn't nowhere else for 'em to go. The rest'runt shet down--the Equity wouldn't give 'em any more credit. Bannon stopped givin' 'em any mor'n a year ago. Yes--they jest had to shet down. An' there's so many thrashin' crews around here, somebody has to feed 'em--the Lord knows!

"You're one o' the new schoolmams, I reckon--you're a day earlier'n most of 'em. They usually wait till the last minute, an' then half of 'em can't find a place to stay.

You'll be wantin' a room here, I reckon."

The woman's whining drawl told Jean she was from the South--that she was 'white trash'. "You'll be wantin' to eat here too, I expect," Mrs. Landers continued. "There ain't nowhere else you can go, nohow. Well--you jest come downstairs when the bell rings an' set down at the table. You can eat with the family an' the reg'lar boarders--an' won't have to eat with them thrashin' crews."

When Jean came down to dinner, however, she thought at first that she had been relegated to the thrashers after all. But the squat young man in coveralls was Joe Beck, proprietor of the local garage, she learned; the others were Mr. Landers, his two overgrown sons, and Dud Morgan--whose status was not explained to Jean. Their frank stares of appraisement made her feel kinship to the forlorn goldfish whose bowl formed the table centerpiece.

"Jest set right down an' start eatin'," Mrs. Landers told her. As a girl came from the kitchen with a dish of potatoes, she added: "This is Edner, Miss Taylor, You set down, Edner--I'll wait on the table."

Jean thought at first that the request had been a courtesy to her--but Edna sat down beside Dud Morgan. She gave the impression of hovering over him as she did so. Jean was amused.

Before the end of the meal she had learned that the Sleeping Child school superintendent was a new one, and unmarried--that the old one 'jest wasn't any good', although married--that last year's English teacher had married a Bitter Root man who was well-to-do--that Dud Morgan was an

ex-soldier drawing compensation, and didn't have to work--and that the fish in the river were taking spinners....

Later, as she sat at her unwashed window upstairs, she saw a man and a woman cross the moon-lit yard below and enter the graded school building next door. They were Dud and Edna, she realized. No lights went on in the building; Dud and Edna did not need lights....

When Jean came to breakfast next morning, the thrashing crews were waiting on the porch for a truck to take them to their work. Edna was still resetting the table; Jean went to a window, saw a young man coming up the street. He joined the group on the porch.

"That's the new supe--him with the pipe," Edna said. "You can set down now; it's all ready."

Mr. Landers said: "Yeah, that's him; he's been helpin' Cooper thrash. Cooper's on the school board, so--"

Mrs. Landers looked at Jean. "Maybe she wants to talk to 'im. You go call 'im in, Obie."

"Jean said: "Don't, please. There's a teachers' meeting at two o'clock; I can see him then."

Mrs. Landers said: "Well, I thought maybe--But you can see 'im then, I expect."

Jean knew what she had thought, however. The superintendent was young, and unmarried...

Jean had assumed that other teachers would room at the 'hotel', but none appeared. When she asked Edna if others were expected, the girl replied that she didn't know. Mrs. Landers had said there was nowhere else they could room. Jean felt, by that time, that a tent would be preferable to the Landers Hotel.

The high school building was at one end of the town's main street; it was the most prominent feature in the landscape. Jean went to the teachers' meeting that afternoon. Wilson was in the hall when she entered the building.

He said: "Hello--you're Miss Taylor, aren't you? I'm Bart Wilson."

Jean took his outstretched hand, said: "How do you do, Mr. Wilson."

The other teachers, ten besides Jean, already had arrived. Wilson introduced her to them and started the meeting. It was the usual thing--assignment of classes, student registration, explanations of teacher-duties. Jean could see that Wilson had planned his program, both for the grades and for the high school. He was high school principal, as well as superintendent of the system.

When the routine matters were finished, he asked if there were any questions.

Jean had one. "Is there any place where teachers can stay--besides the Landers Hotel?"

Everybody laughed--except Jean. "Well--I stayed there last night!" she exclaimed. "And if it's the only place--I'm going to dig a cave to live in!"

Wilson grinned. "Did Mrs. Landers tell you it was the only place?"

"She did!"

"She was taking advantage of your youth and innocence," he said. "I've made tentative arrangements for all the new teachers. There's a room for you at Mrs. Day's, Miss Taylor. And if you must tear yourself away from the Landers Hotel--"

he grinned again--"I'll have the school truck pick up your trunk. Landers grabbed that last night, I imagine--to make sure of you."

Jean moved that afternoon. Two other teachers were rooming at Mrs. Day's; Jean learned that most of the faculty took their meals there. Her room was a pleasant one, and the meals were excellent.

Mrs. Landers, however, resented Jean's exodus. "Nobody has to stay in this hotel that don't want to," she sniffed as Jean paid her bill. "I reckon you'll find it handier at the Widder Day's, though. The supe lives next door--at Gus Smith's."

Before the end of the week Jean's fellow teachers were teasing her for another reason, however. Mrs. Landers had spread the word that Jean had tried to 'shine up to Dud--an' beat Edner's time'.

III

Jean started a girls' glee club--the Sleeping Child boys considered it sissified to sing--and organized a beginners' band. But in place of the elementary school music supervision she had expected, Wilson gave her three classes in freshman English. There was nobody else to take them; he was teaching three science classes in the high school himself.

Almost before she realized it had begun, the month slipped by--and she received her first pay check. She sent part of it to Judson; he had paid for her board and room while she was at the University.

Jean found that she liked teaching; it left her no time to think about anything else, at first; and it made her feel important--that she mattered in the scheme of human existence. She was thrilled, too, to see that the youngsters liked her, especially her band. When they saw she could pick up almost any instrument and play their scales and exercises herself--she had learned to do that at the University--their liking became admiration of the highest order.

Sleeping Child had two burning ambitions for its high school--a championship basketball team, and a band that would eclipse that of Bennington, its nearest neighbor-town. Heretofore it had been able to 'point with pride' at its basketball teams--but it had had no band. Jean's organization, and the fact that its leader was a young girl, became the talk of the town.

Her English classes, however, did not go so smoothly. Wilson had come to one of her band practices the first week; he had stayed long enough to see that she knew what she was doing and had left. As he had to supervise both high school and grades--besides teaching three classes himself--he had little time for any one teacher anyway.

But he got around to her English classes finally--sat through an entire period of "Treasure Island". Jean knew the book--and was telling it to her students. She had drawn a map of the island on the blackboard. It was a thing of beauty, she felt--it was colored and lettered neatly, and was embellished with whales, ships, and other cartographer's conventional designs. Her pupils thought so too; they stared at it--instead of listening to her dissertation on pirates.

When she had dismissed the class, Wilson came up to her desk. "You're going to make a good teacher, Miss Taylor," he said; "but you talk too much. You're feeding 'em with a spoon--when they ought to bite into that book and experience it for themselves. Do you see what I mean?"

Jean was indignant. "I certainly can't teach without talking," she said. "They've all read the book; I'm trying to explain what they haven't been able to get out of it."

"Couldn't you write down what you're saying in the form of questions--and make the class dig out the answers for themselves?"

Jean flushed. She had not thought of doing that.

"I'm sorry, she said coldly. "From now on I'll ~~use~~ that method, if you prefer it."

Wilson looked at her. "Hell--I'm no hide-bound pedagogue," he said. "If I may use the vernacular, I don't give a damn what method you use--so long as it gets results. My job's to help you do that; and I'm just trying to--that's all."

"Have you measured the results I'm getting?"

He grinned--she was nobody's fool. "No, I haven't. Have you?"

"Only with my own tests," Jean admitted. "And every student in this class has passed them. If you want me to give them one of the standard tests--"

"Let's settle for that," he said. "And if this class rates average with what other groups are doing--I'll be wrong and you'll be right, Miss Taylor. But we'll both know your method is working--won't we?"

"Yes."

"That's the only part that matters," he said. "You and I are just tools to do a job--that's all."

Jean gave the tests, and her class fell considerably below the average. Humiliated by the fact and still resentful of Wilson's criticism--he was no patriarch with a long gray beard; he was only a few years older than she was--Jean took the results to the office.

"You were right," she admitted. "My class didn't know the things they should have known--the things I was sure they would know. My excuse is--youth and innocence."

He had said, the first day, that Landers had taken advantage of her 'youth and innocence'. Jean had resented his saying it--had not forgotten it.

"I guess that got under your skin--I didn't mean it to," he said. "And I wasn't trying to play heavy-administrator when I criticized your method the other day, Miss Taylor. Won't you try to understand that?"

"I've no reason to misunderstand it. I was wrong, and you were justified in your criticism."

"I don't like 'criticism', though. Let's say you were doing the best you knew, and I was tactless when I tried to show you a more practical method."

IV

But it was not a question of understanding, with Jean. It was a matter of feeling. Her ego had been deflated--she had believed she was doing a magnificent job of teaching "Treasure Island"--and she fancied that Wilson was smiling inwardly at the outcome of their argument. But she could

not avoid him, either at the high school or at Mrs. Day's, where he took his meals, as did most of the other teachers.

She learned that his first name was Bartholomew--thought it suggestive of the patriarch with whiskers. But Wilson was no patriarch. After a few weeks everyone in town called him 'Bart'--except Jean.

Aside from school functions and Saturday-night dances there was little organized entertainment in Sleeping Child. The nearest motion picture theater was at Bennington, six miles away. To amuse themselves the boarders at Mrs. Day's formed a bridge club, but they did more talking than bridge playing. Occasionally after dinner they would gather around the piano to sing popular songs and old favorites. Bart always stayed for the singing, although he did not sing himself.

"Aren't you musical--don't you sing or play some instrument, Bart?" Lois Biggers, the fifth-grade teacher, asked him one night.

"Surest thing you know," he grinned. "I'm a professional--on the trap-drums."

But he insisted he couldn't sing. "I've a hunch that Miss Taylor can play more than accompaniments, though," he added. "Do something alone for us, Miss Taylor."

"Where do you two get that 'miss' and 'mister' stuff?" Lois jeered. "Haven't you been introduced yet?"

He smiled. "All right--will you play for us, Jean?"

Her technic had improved at the University, but her playing had not. It was mechanical, lacked feeling, her instructors had told her. Jean had had no feeling to put

into it. But that night she played as she had in Boonville--and better than she had ever played.

Wilson came and stood by the piano. "Don't stop," he said. "I could listen to that all night."

CHAPTER XVI

I

Jack Hull, vocationally nicknamed 'Post Office', was the only one of Mrs. Day's boarders who was not a teacher. One evening he brought an old brass alto horn--he called it a 'peck horn'--and tooted with the piano while the others sang. He was good at it, Jean realized; he read and transposed sheet-music with an amazing facility.

Lois Biggers asked: "Where did you learn to do all that stuff, Post Office?"

"Just a gift, Scatter-Brain," he assured her. "Just inspiration. Your boy-friend's a musical genius."

But he winked at Jean. She knew that he was not improvising--that he was dropping three flats and reading the bass clef like the treble. Presently he told her that he had played six years in a Marine Band. Jean herself had progressed from a mellophone in the University band to a French horn in the orchestra; they began to discuss the two instruments.

Lois yawned two or three times. She and Post Office had developed a rapid-fire romance, and she considered him her exclusive property. Finally she said: "If you have to go technical on us, Post Office--you can just leave that horn at home from now on! Jean's predatory anyway. She's using her music as a siren's snare!"

He grinned: "Speaking of 'snares'--let's make Bart get a set of drums, Jean. Then we three can play for dances."

"And I'll sit 'em out--and twiddle my thumbs!" Lois exclaimed. "Like fun--I will!"

Bart had left to attend a meeting, but Post Office mentioned the drums to him next morning at breakfast. Trap-drumming would not enhance his dignity as a superintendent, Wilson realized--but he loved to drum. And there might be other compensations....

Next day he wired to Billings, where his parents lived, for his outfit. But he told no one except Post Office that he had done so. And when the drums came, he developed misgivings about using them.

Jean and Post Office were to play for an Eastern Star dance the following Saturday night, however. "Bring your traps up and sit in with us," Post Office told Bart. "We need you."

Wilson hesitated. "Jean might think I'm trying to horn in," he said.

"Baloney! Why should she? Come on up--and show her you're a human being, not just a superintendent!"

Bart promised to think it over.

But he was called to Stevensville Saturday afternoon, and did not return until after dark. Lights in the Odd Fellows' hall told him that the Eastern Star dance had started. If Jean chose to snub him, he could take it, he thought....

Leaving his traps in the anteroom, he stood inside the door for a few minutes and watched the dance. The Eastern

Stars had made it a parade of grim, determined dignity. He went over to the platform, where Jean and Post Office were playing.

"You two working hard?" he questioned.

"Yes," Jean said; isn't it awful?"

Post Office grimaced. "The yaps don't even try to keep step. They--just waddle around!"

"I might give you a little moral support," Bart said. "Shall I get my traps?"

Jean said: "Havens--go get them!"

She and Post Office labored through a waltz while he set them up. When it ended Bart did a roll on the bass drum, changed to a rapid-fire patter of rhythm on everything in reach--including the pipe of the pot-bellied stove--finished with an ear-splitting cymbal clash.

"Choose your partners--with care and discrimination--for a Paul Jones, ladies and gentlemen!" he shouted.

"Then he said to Jean: "Make it 'Twelfth Street Rag', kid--and make it hot!"

Be became an automaton of syncopation--his face relaxed in the set grin of the 'natural'--the drums and gadgets in front of him rippling a raucous challenge of rhythm. Jean and Post Office fell into the swing of the familiar tune, and the three became a unit. The Eastern Stars--forgot to be Eastern Stars...

It was spontaneous, sound-engendered hypnotism, Jean realized. She could see that Bart had projected himself out on the floor with the dancers. And as he played to his rhythm, she herself was swept along by it--by the personality

back of it.....Bart was no longer the superintendent who had criticized her. He was a man--whose reality as a man hammered itself into her consciousness, made her accept him as a man...

A feeling of lightness--of relief--of exultation--came over her. She was glad there was such a man...She knew that now--after four inanimate years--she was alive again!

II

"I'll walk home with you," he said, after the dance. Jean had known that he would.

"The guy's gone off and left his drums," Post Office told Lois. "He didn't even know that we were here."

"Jean wasn't what I'd call 'crowd-conscious'."

"Well--that's that, I guess," he said.

Jean and Bart followed the dimly lighted street to Joe Beck's garage, cut across the vacant lot to Mrs. Day's. They passed Mrs. Day's.

Jean murmured: "I should go in--but I don't want to."

"You shouldn't--and I don't want you to."

They came to the edge of town, Price's alfalfa field. There was a wall of loose-piled rock around it. He lifted her over the wall, vaulted it himself. They walked along the edge of the field, his arm around her. The night was lighted only by a few stars, that dodged in and out behind the clouds.

Presently Jean made out a pair of black silhouettes--Price's haystacks. She had seen them from her window every morning since she had been at Mrs. Day's....Across the Sapphires beyond them was Helena; and far beyond Helena, a

'sapphire country'--the 'Land of the Sky' where she was born....

She knew that Bart would hold her close and kiss her. She wanted him to. After four years of utter loneliness she was emotionally starved. She thrilled to be wanted again--thrilled to his youth and vitality which were complements of her own. They drew her to him, as a loadstone attracts steel.

But the haystacks were Frustration....

They reminded her that she had no right to his arm around her waist, no right to the kiss she wanted....She was bound to Sam Baron--by the predestination which she had accepted as her atonement....

"It's beautiful out here, " she said wistfully. "We'll have to go back though."

But she lacked will to break the spell of promise. It swept away memories for her--everything, but feeling. Her womanhood had been denied for four years; now that the cup of its just need was being held out to her, the girl could not push the cup away.

They came to a break in the wall and stopped. Bart took her in his arms and kissed her--gently, then passionately. Jean's arms and lips answered his. Then she sighed, drew away from him.

"We must go back now," she said.

"We love each other, Jean. Will you marry me?"

"I can't--I can't even let you make love to me. There's--somebody else...."

"But you forgot that tonight. You came out here with

me--let me kiss you--because you wanted it that way.

Doesn't that mean anything?"

"Yes, it does," she admitted. "I--go like you, Bart.... But I've been unfair to you. I--just couldn't help it! I wanted somebody...."

He kissed her again. And Jean once more forgot past and future, lost herself in the present ecstasy of their shared kiss....But memory came back to her--like a blow in the face.

"No, Bart! I've no right to do that!" she exclaimed. "I shouldn't have come with you; I know you'll--just hate me!"

"Why should I hate you, Jean?"

"But you will. Go on--hate me!" she said bitterly.

"It's the best--the only way out of it..."

"Hell--you've tried to keep away from me," he muttered.

"I have," she admitted. "I've looked for excuses to--to dislike you. And I--just can't...."

"You don't have to dislike me," he said. "And I'm not going to hate you. Are you already married, Jean?"

"No, I'm not....Why couldn't we have met--like Lois and Post Office? Aren't we entitled to--something?"

"Aren't we?"

"No. It would be...cheating Destiny...."

That was sheer melodrama--and Bart knew she was not melodramatic.

"Look here, Jean," he said. "The only destiny there is happens to be working with us tonight. You're no adolescent; you're a woman, and I'm a man. The guy you're engaged to,

whoever he is, is going to need more than 'Destiny'.

Is he a better man than I am?"

"No--I don't know....I'm--just tied to him." How could she know? She hadn't seen Sam for over four years....

Whatever was back of it was real--in her own mind, at least--Bart could see. But it was a cockeyed idea--Jean loved him, not the other fellow.

"Poor kid," he muttered. "Can you tell me about it?"

Jean went into his arms again, sobbed on his shoulder.

"Oh--Bart, Bart!" she whispered.

III

But she did not tell him about it. Jean had never told anyone about Sam Baron, not even Edythe. And Bart, realizing the subject was painful to her, waited until she could bring herself to talk about it. Jean had agreed, however, that it was silly for them to avoid each other; and they began to go out together. The other women teachers who had had their eyes on Bart sighed privately--accepted the situation with gloomy fatalism.

But all of them envied Jean. Even Lois Biggers, who was engaged to Post Office. He realized the fact and, strangely enough, did not resent it.

"Every dame in town's nuts about Bart," he told Lois.

"But he can't see any of you--except Jean."

"I'm not nuts about him!" she flared.

"Nope, you're too smart to let yourself be," he grinned. "But Jean is--or is she? I can't figure her."

"She's just playing him--and is she clever about it!"

Jean couldn't figure herself, as a matter of fact. She had read enough Freud and Bertrand Russel to realize what Bart had meant when he had said the only destiny there was--the man-woman attraction--was working with them. But the idea of sex-determination was repugnant to her; she had not yet assimilated it--was not capable of evaluating it. She felt that love had to be 'spiritual'--and she didn't know what 'spiritual' meant.

She was attracted to Bart, however; she admired and respected him; their interests were mutual. But she still felt that she had no right to love anybody--except Sam Baron.

Thanksgiving and Christmas came--and passed. Jean spent the Christmas holidays in Helena; Bart, with his parents in Billings. At first it was enough for Jean to see him and talk to him, to realize that he was respecting her secrecy....

Spring came, and the snow disappeared from the foothills of the Bitter Roots and Sapphires, to linger in its summer redouts, the jagged mountain ranges which paralleled the Bitter Root river. The gray foothills began to look green; the river filled its banks, then gradually subsided.

The farmers quit discussing the apple and potato yields, began talking of the wheat prospects. If the rust didn't take it--if there was water enough to irrigate it--if the grasshoppers let it alone--a few ventured to predict they might have a pretty fair crop. But more conservative ones hastened to propitiate the gods of chance--declared there would be no market for wheat anyway!

The chief immediate threat, however, was grasshoppers.

As Bart and Jean walked down to the river one evening, he pointed to the thousands of insects clinging to the vegetation along the road. "I've seen 'em strip a field in a couple of days," he told her. "If a wind doesn't come up and blow 'em out of the valley, it's good-bye to the wheat crop."

"Can't the farmers do anything about them?"

"They do--what you see 'em doing. But another cloud of hoppers may blow in next day--and another the following one. When that happens, there's nothing anybody can do."

"It's just....blind chance....."

"No, it's just grasshoppers--trying to achieve their grasshopper destiny."

"Like we're doing."

"More-or-less--but they make good fish bait. Next Sunday's the first day of the season. ~~Shall we go fishing?~~"

"We might as well, I suppose."

"Your enthusiasm is overwhelming," he grinned. "Do you know what I'd like to do?"

"What?"

"Tap you gently but firmly on the head with a club, twine my fingers into that mop of black hair--and drag you off to a nice, quiet cave!"

"Isn't that--rather conventional?"

"It has quite a lot of racial tradition back of it--and you can't laugh off racial tradition."

"It wouldn't settle anything, though."

"Why not? You'd be so darned busy--skinning the mastodons I killed, tanning the hides, looking after our

swarm of kids--little things like that--that it would settle everything, it seems to me."

"I'd be--just a squaw...."

"Ever hear of a squaw's having a nervous breakdown?"

Jean laughed. "You certainly make your cave convincing," she said. "Why don't you--drag me to it?"

They had come to the river. It divided below the bridge, cutting off a sliver of wooded island. Bart picked her up and waded into the shallow stream.

"This is a desert island--it won't do," she said when they reached it. "We would be rescued...."

Sam Baron would return, like Enoch Arden, would point his accusing finger at her....Or he might kill Bart, as he had killed Pinkie Santerre....

But Bart was not worried by symbolism--or bewildered by an obsession. He carried Jean back into the trees and made love to her--as he knew she wanted him to, as he knew she needed to be made love to....

IV

Finally she stirred in his arms. "I guess this--doesn't matter," she murmured. "It's all blind chance, Bart.....We human beings are just grasshoppers....There isn't any more purpose, or meaning, to us than there is to grasshoppers..."

He lit a cigarette, gave it to her and lit another. Jean did not smoke--but she took the cigarette.

"If there isn't any purpose, there can't be any responsibility," he said. "Ever think of it from that angle, Jean?"

"I have--and it still doesn't make sense," she said.

"I'm willing to accept the responsibility of living--God knows, they've been dinned into me enough!--if somebody can show me they mean something. But how can they, when we're just tossed around by Fate--blown whichever way the winds of chance happen to turn!"

"What do you want 'em to mean, Jean?"

"What they used to mean to me--truth, justice, faith, love--right and wrong...God used to mean those things to me..."

"Doesn't He still mean them?"

"No," she said bitterly. "Jehovah--is just an anthropomorphic tribal deity! In the Old Testament He sanctioned mass-murder and human sacrifice. Original Sin is merely a part of the Adam-and-Eve myth--and without it Atonement breaks down. There's no need for Atonement--no need for any of it!"

"Right and wrong," she went on, "have become racial mores, depending on time and place. Love--isn't only the emotional flutterings of the reproductive instinct.."

"Nuts," he cut in gruffly. "There's purpose for you. Hasn't the instinct--with its flutterings--kept the race going for some millions of years? And didn't the Hebrew Jehovah represent the best answer the Israelites could give to the purposes and meanings of existence? Wasn't Jehovah a step in religious evolution--several steps, in fact? What's wrong with him?"

"He was a myth--like Jupiter, Isis, Thor, and all the others.....And as a child I was taught to pray to Him--to reverence His Holy Name....."

Bart did not answer immediately. She had been brought up as a Fundamentalist, he realized. Every life-meaning, every life-purpose had been tied up with the dogmas of her church.....Living as he had, in an atmosphere of free thinking, he had forgot that such a system of belief still existed--here in America, in the Twentieth Century....

"Why call any of 'em myths?" he asked finally. "Why not say, rather, that they were the closest approaches to God--to a First Cause--that their creators could understand? And why not look on Heaven and Hell, Original Sin, the Devil--all their gropings--as similar attempts to explain the why's of human existence?"

"What does that leave us?"

"Everything--everything that matters. It leaves us the truth--as much of it as has been dug by Science from God's textbook, nature itself. It shows us life, climbing the ladder of evolution, from the primal cell to man--who has mastered his environment with mind, created his own purposes, and can now hasten his own evolution!"

"It puts everything up to us--without any God."

"No--it brings us closer to God," he said earnestly.

"In biology, geology--in the whole picture--we find a pattern. We find laws of nature which cannot be broken--and that's truth! We find those who break the laws--natural laws, God's laws, not man's--failing to survive; and that's Divine Justice!"

"And we can see two basic, driving purposes, Jean," he told her: "The instinct to survive as individuals and

the urge to perpetuate the race. Natural variation, adaptation, the survival of the fittest--all are basic justice--and parts of a pattern, a Divine Plan."

"I don't want a God who is merely a Plan."

"Can you conceive of a Plan without a Planner?"

That was teleological philosophy, she realized.....

She asked: "Where does it leave us?"

"As masters of our own destiny, limited only by natural laws--and our individual intelligences."

"Yes," she mused, "I suppose it does...."

"But there's more," he said. "Isn't the privilege of living--achieved for us, and handed down through millions of years--enough of a purpose, without any artificial ones? Who are we to belittle the privilege--because a few of our pet, man-made patterns have gone haywire?"

Jean fumbled inside her blouse--broke the chain which held a small diamond ring. "I've worn that around my neck for over four years," she told him. "It has been a symbol... that I was bound to the man who gave it to me....He killed another man....because of me....."

She stopped and bit her lips, then went on: "He was jealous, Bart. I hadn't given him any reason to be--any real reason....He left Boonville without trying to see me--has never written to me....I don't know whether--whether he's still alive or not...."

He muttered: "Poor kid---it must have been Hell."

"It was," she said. "Wait here, Bart. I'll be right back."

He watched her go down to the river, saw the flash of the ring as she threw it out into the main current.....

CHAPTER XVII

I

The school term closed in May. Jean was offered a contract at Sleeping Child for the following year, but she did not sign it. Her band and girls' glee club had made good showings at the district meet, and on the strength of their performances she was offered the musical supervisorsh in the Bennington schools. As the Bennington system was a bigger one, she accepted the better position.

Bart elected to stay at Sleeping Child, for another year anyway. Jean decided to go to the University of Washington that summer, to work on her master's degree. Bart already had his; he planned to spend the summer with his parents in Billings. But he drove Jean to Seattle. Post Office drove Lois, who needed some education credits. On the way the four spent a night in Wallace, Idaho.

As they waited in a restaurant for their dinner orders to be taken, Lois said: "We're saving money on this trip, folks--meet 'Mr. and Mrs. Jones, of Missoula'!"

Bart said: "Why don't you make it 'Mr. and Mrs. Hull', and be done with it?"

"I'd lose my job--you know that," Lois said. "Married women can't teach in Montana. And the 'Smiths' are still available--if you and Bart happen to be interested," she told Jean.

Jean blushed. She was more shocked at the brazenness of Lois than at the moral issue involved, however. She knew that unmarried couples--and some of them school teachers--

were more-or-less addicted to week-end honeymooning.

Bart grinned at Lois.

He said: "We don't play it that way. But don't let us stop you."

"We won't," Lois assured him. "If Post Office ever gets to making enough money, we'll be married, I suppose. But will our sleeping together be any more 'moral'--because a preacher has mumbled some tripe over us?"

It wouldn't for Lois, Bart thought. He said: "I'd be willing to settle for a justice of the peace--if Jean would."

Lois said bluntly: "If you won't--you'd better learn what the score is, Jean. How long do you think you're going to live--a million years?"

Jean's face flamed. She said: "I don't care for this conversation. Will you take me somewhere else, Bart?"

Lois sneered: "You'd better, Bart--and teach her the facts of life!"

Before they found another restaurant, however, Jean said: "Let's go back and eat with them. Lois is crude--but I'm being a prig. Their morals are none of my business."

"Check," he smiled. "Don't let her get you down, Jean."

As they re-entered the booth, Post Office sprang up and bowed. "Welcome home, folks! Us McCoys wave the white flag!"

"We Whitfields have decided to save our powder," Bart grinned. "We're starving to death. What have you two pariahs ordered?"

"Steaks. I'm sorry, Jean," Lois said. "For Pete's sake--sit down!"

After the meal she and Post Office decided to see a picture show. Jean and Bart had seen it the week before, in Missoula. They wandered up the town's principal street, came to a park and sat down.

"What do you think of their moral philosophy?" he asked.

"Do they have any?"

Probably not. Lois thinks she's being 'modern'."

She said thoughtfully: "It means more than that, though."

"What?"

"You're her superintendent, Bart--and Lois isn't worrying about the fact. She knows your secrecy code is stronger than your moral one."

He smiled. "It isn't, though--it's a matter of relative damage, Jean. The harm of their sharing a room together--over here in Wallace--is relative to the damage my making a stink about it would do in Sleeping Child. Isn't it?"

"Yes."

"And unless we gossip about it--which we won't--nobody else will ever know about it, the chances are. Sleeping Child doesn't give a damn about such affairs anyway--so long as they are kept sub rosa."

"In other words--morals are relative to time and place."

"Yes, they're actually determined by time and place."

"Then--why shouldn't we share a room?"

He stared at her. The suggestion was so utterly foreign to Jean that he thought he had misunderstood her.

"I've been babbling about 'purposes'--calling myself a 'grasshopper'--when I haven't the courage even to be a normal grasshopper!" she exclaimed. "You said I could be

mistress of my own destiny--and I will be! Do you want me tonight?"

"Damn it, Jean--you know I do! But--"

"Well, here I am--take me!"

"But you don't mean it," he said. "Your whole life cries out against it. Can't you see that?"

"Let it cry--let it shriek and gibber!" she said fiercely. "My life has made me a thing--that mopes and thinks--too weak, too cowardly to live! If Lois can do it--"

"You aren't Lois, Jean."

"No! She sneered at me--because she knows I'm a prig! But I won't be one. For the first time in my life, Bart, I'm actually sane. I'm done with mooning and dripping over Sam Baron--telling myself I must be 'true' to him! My mole's conscience has hurt me--even if I let a man kiss me! But now--thank God--I'm sane!"

He put his arm around her. "Take it easy, Jean," he begged. "Try to calm down a little--won't you?"

"I don't want to be calm! I want to shriek and scream to the world that I'm free! I'm free--to be your mistress! And I'll glory in it! Jean Taylor--Jean Taylor, from Boonville!--can be a man's mistress--without imbecile qualms of conscience!"

"Listen to me!" he commanded. "I love you. I want you as the woman I love--not as a gesture against Boonville. Can't you see that?"

"I hate love--it's nothing but agony and mental degradation! It's idea-bondage--to places like Boonville."

"But you're free from Boonville now--"

"Yes! And the irony of it--the colossal joke of it!--is that all my 'thinking' had nothing to do with it! It was Lois--silly, shallow, cheap little Lois!--who made me ashamed of myself!"

"Then--thank God for Lois!"

"But she shan't sneer at me! I'll be as brave as she is! Do you want me, Bart? I'm throwing myself at you--I'm utterly depraved--and I'm free to be!"

"You aren't free, Jean. Not if you let Lois--and Boonville--decide things for you."

"So....I'm a woman scorned!"

"No, damn it! You're a woman loved!"

She laughed hysterically.

She murmured: "Oh----Bart, Bart!"

II

He drove her to a roadhouse, insisted that she take a stiff drink and eat a reasonable meal. Jean had eaten almost nothing at dinner. Afterwards they danced for a while, then returned to the hotel. They sat in the lobby and talked until four o'clock in the morning.

She said: "I won't go Bernhardt on you again, Bart."

"You can go anything you please with me, Jean. If it helps to talk--or cry or scream--"

She smiled. "I've finished with the histrionics. But I hate to--to make you wet-nurse to my emotions. You deserve better than that."

"Nuts. That blow-off was scheduled. You simply had to get it out of your system--and I'm damned glad you have."

"And I'm--glad you were the one to witness it."

They breakfasted with Lois and Post Office. Jean was paler than usual, Bart noticed; otherwise she seemed normal.

"Did you two make a night of it?" Lois asked.

Jean smiled. "Not quite, Lois."

Lois had relatives in Wenatchee. She and Post Office stopped there; Jean and Bart drove on to Seattle. Before they reached it, Bart qualified in the State of Washington as a one-armed driver. Jean had slept for two hours, with her head on his shoulder.

She awoke as they came to Renton. "Goodness-I must have been asleep," she yawned. "It's nine-thirty."

"So it is--and you snored like a traveling salesman."

"I didn't do any such thing!"

"How about a couple o' dogs and a slug of java?"

"They'd be heavenly!"

But they were merely appetizers. Jean and Bart drove into Seattle and registered at a hotel. In the elevator he said: "Get prettied up. Then we'll have dinner and see the town."

"Dinner! Are you ready to eat again?"

"I am--and so are you."

Jean laughed. "You must be psychic--I'm simply ravenous!"

When he was ready he went to her room and knocked. She opened the door, enough for him to see her face and a bare shoulder. "Must you burst in on a lady--while she's dressing?" I'm shocked at you, Bart!"

He grinned. "You don't sound like it."

"Well, I am," she said primly. "I'll meet you in the lobby, Mrs. Wilson!"

She blew him a kiss, closed the door. Jean had changed, he realized. She had developed no embarrassment over her previous night's emotional outburst; she had more assurance, more animation, than he had ever seen in her before. And Bart suspected she was smiling secretly at the embarrassing position in which her offer to become his mistress had placed him.

Well, let her smile, he thought. She needed to smile--at anything she could....But he was no Sir Galahad--or damned eunuch! Jean ought to know she'd made him look like a sap. And she didn't have to rub it in....

They had dinner at a night club and danced until one o'clock. Jean had three cocktails, wanted another. But he talked her out of it.

"If you want to get lit, let's go back to the hotel," he said. "The bell-hop will fix us up with anything we want--and the trimmings."

"Would you 'get lit' too?"

"Absolutely--why not?"

Jean laughed. "All right--let's go!"

But back in her room at the hotel she said: "Neither of us wants to get drunk--it's the sort of thing Lois and Post Office would do...We aren't Lois and Post Office."

"No, Jean, we aren't."

She put her hands on his shoulders. "Kiss me good-night, she said. "And remember I'm not--very lucid.....When I am--

when I know what I do want--I'll try to make it up to you."

"I want you, Jean. If you can get around to loving me a little--"

She gave him her lips, relaxed in his arms. "Goodness, I'm sleepy," she murmured. "And I'm utterly happy--I'm thrilled to death!"

"Why, dear?"

"A man is kissing me passionately in my hotel room, at one-thirty in the morning--and Boonville is gnashing its teeth!"

Bart muttered: "Damn Boonville!"

III

She hadn't been smiling at his embarrassment, Bart realized. The whole thing was still a gesture with her, a defiance to Boonville. Before starting back to Sleeping Child next day he said good-bye to her at the University. They were under the pines above the stadium.

"Why do you have to go back?" she wailed. "Just when I'm learning to be a hussy--and liking it!"

"You didn't have to learn--"

He kissed her. He said: "Let's get married, Jean. Then I won't go back."

"No.....Want an encore?"

He took several. Jean laughed. "That was--a new program, not an encore!"

"Damn it--I'd like to spank you, Jean!"

"Do!" she sighed. "I need a strong man who will beat me--and clasp me to his throbbing breast and make me forget! Does yours throb, Bart? I forgot to listen."

He compromised with the clasping.

"It does throb!" she giggled. "It fairly clasks--like a brass knocker! Could you have swallowed one?"

"Just the heart-valves--they need grinding."

"Did you ever hear what the governor of North Carolina said to the governor of South Carolina?"

"No. What did he say?"

"He said--what I think about the encores!"

"What was it--brat?"

"I'm surprised, Bart--I'm actually amazed--that a man of your wide reading doesn't know what he said."

"Tell me--or I start spanking!"

"And I'll start screaming! And the whole summer school will come running. And you'll never learn what the governor of North Carolina said to the--"

"'--governor of South Carolina!'" he cried. "Now you've got me doing it!"

Letters from Judson and Kate, and an occasional one from Dr. Boone--they were in excellent English, and did not seem like the doctor--kept reminding her of Boonville that summer. She hated the place, but she longed to see the ones who wrote, especially Judson and the doctor. She had a million things she wanted to talk over with Dr. Boone--things she could not discuss with Judson. And it made her heart ache to realize that he would not understand them--because he had lacked the courage to experience them himself.

Kate and Chet were no longer in Boonville. He had given up the idea of preaching; he was principal of a small county high school in the Piedmont section of the state.

He and Kate had three children. The youngest, a girl, they had named after Jean.

Sam and Sally Taylor had driven Edythe to California for her vacation. The week before Jean's summer school ended, Edythe wrote that she was engaged to be married. The letter was feverishly scrawled--Edythe herself:

"He's just divine--I love him simply to distraction, Jean! You'll love him too. But not too much--for Pete's sake! I want you to be my bridesmaid--the date's the twelfth of August. I wish it were sooner! His name is Jones--isn't it quaint and original? I'm simply thrilled to death!...."

Again Jean experienced the feeling of alone-ness which had come to her when Kate and Chet were married...Kate had left her a girl; Edythe was leaving her a woman....

Bart's letters urged her to marry him; but her mind was still full of conflicting ideas about love and marriage. And now that she had found her life was her own to live, she dreaded surrendering it to any one--even Bart. Nor did she want to love any one again, as she had loved Sam Baron. To do that, she felt, was mental degradation.

But Jean was honest enough to admit to herself that she needed marriage. Boonville would sneer at her for 'needing a man', she thought, while it held out to her the mockery--if she could achieve it--of a 'marriage made in heaven'....But marriage without love, she felt, would be a prostitution of moral integrity--a concession both to sex and to Boonville....

She liked and admired Bart, however--felt a strong physical attraction to him....

Jean went to the University library and found several books on sex and marriage; she read and studied them. Other than technical treatments in Dr. Boone's medical books, they were the first frank discussions of the questions she had ever read. They made her blush--that she, a woman twenty-three years old, should have been so abysmally ignorant.

Her wanting a man--her sex-consciousness--she came to realize, was not an indication of moral weakness or of emotional instability; nor--as she had feared vaguely--did it brand her as a nymphomaniac. It meant only that she had become a mature woman, physically and mentally. Without it, she would be abnormal--physically or mentally...

For the first time in her life, Jean dared to think about sex frankly and without inhibitions. She tore away the inhibitions ruthlessly--they were Boonville-engendered. She personified them--like John Bunyan in Pilgrim's Progress--as Ignorance, Vulgarity, Superstition. As such, she thought, they were forces of evil....

IV

Bart and Post Office came for her and Lois at the end of the summer school. But Bart and Jean decided to drive around the Olympic Peninsula before returning to Montana.

He said: "What about Lois and Post Office?"

"We don't need chaperones," Jean said. "And they would be challenges to depravity, anyway."

"So they would," he agreed. "We'll just not tell 'em we're going."

They took the Ballard-Ludlow ferry that afternoon, planned to spend the night at Lake Crescent. On the way,

however, Bart turned into a side road and parked in a grove of yellow pine.

Jean said: "You wouldn't be planning a petting party, by any chance?"

"I'm planning to beat you--and drag you off to my cave! Don't you remember?"

"Yes, I remember..."

He studied her. "Why the note of tremendous seriousness? Have you lost the maidenly desire to play hussy which characterized our last adieus, my dear?"

Jean smiled. "I was just a silly idiot that day...I'm sorry, Bart."

"For Pete's sake--why?"

"It wasn't fair to you. I was....just ignorant."

"I don't get it, Jean. You'll have to diagram it."

"Well, it was unfair," she declared. "I encouraged you to make love to me. And I'd already offered to be your mistress--which made it worse."

He stared at her. "Well--I'll be the mother-in-law of a skunk! Are you still worrying about that? And because of it--must we hold hands for the rest of our lives?"

"Not necessarily. You may make love to me--if you want to."

"Of course I want to--I'm in love with you! And we're adults, Jean--we both know the facts of life. Why do you have to apologize for letting me? Don't you want me to?"

"Yes."

"Well--isn't lovemaking the accepted technic of courtship?"

"Yes--but you want me to marry you, Bart."

"And you still don't want to?"

"I do want to," she admitted. "It would settle a lot of things...for both of us. But--I just don't feel right about it. And I've thought a lot about it this summer. I'm not--being coy. I'm trying to be fair, to both of us."

"Did you--decide anything?"

"Yes, I did. We like to be together, and we have the right to be."

"Check. I'd get a kick out of you even if you were a man, Jean. Which--thank God!--you aren't."

"But--it goes further than that...As you said, we're normal, intelligent adults--man and woman. We have a complementary emotional heritage, Bart, which goes back to the beginnings of life itself... And as normal adults--man and woman--we have to be conscious of it. We can't escape it."

"Do you want to escape it?"

"No, I don't....I've always hated the old myth of the passive rib-woman....Eve, the God-given toy to satisfy man's 'lust'--the robot, that became the perpetrator of racial damnation! I'm no rib-woman--thank God! But right now that old myth is making me feel 'immodest'--'unwomanly'--in daring to talk to you about it. I hate it--all of it!"

"I don't blame you for hating it--and you don't have to feel 'immodest' or 'unwomanly' in talking to me about it. But you don't have to hate love, Jean. That's the mental complement of our man-and-woman heritage--and that's the part you're afraid of, it seems to me."

"How can I help hating it? You know what it did to me... And I've heard my own mother murmur 'God is love'--in the

hushed, reverent tones of superstitious awe...But since my babyhood I've also heard her belittle the emotion that brought me into the world--call it 'bestial', 'low', 'degraded'....

"And it brought me as a 'biological accident'--unwanted, she told him. "All my life my mother has resented me. She's never written me since I left Boonville. I actually believe she considers me a God-sent punishment for her sins!"

He muttered: "Poor kid. No wonder you're afraid of love...But it isn't like that," he declared. "And it isn't merely romantic heart-flutterings--Nature's trick, to insure reproduction. You and I--Jean and Bart, man and woman--are the greatest miracle of the Ages....The mating of man and woman has achieved the life of the race, in an unbroken sequence from the start; and the by-products of the mating instinct have been the most powerful driving forces in the mental life of the race."

"I know that," she said. "I know that all creative effort can be traced, directly or indirectly, to the mating instinct. But Nature, for her own purposes, made us as we are--without consideration of religion, morals, or human laws. In all his tampering with himself, man hasn't changed that. He can't--for it's a law of life, as fundamental as the rotation of the planets."

"Has man tried to change it?"

"He's cheapened it, commercialized it--made it a racket! I simply refuse, Bart, to have my passions, the experience which is the right of my womanhood, licensed by marriage!"

CHAPTER XVIII

I

Bart lit a cigarette. "Now we're getting somewhere," he said. "This was supposed to be a petting party though-- and I've got to answer that crack about marriage."

Jean smiled. "Can you answer it?"

"I think so--marriage doesn't happen to be a licensing of passion. It's society's institution to protect children and to determine the responsibility for them."

"Then it doesn't apply to me," she said; "for I'm not planning to have children. Not now, that is. When I'm ready to have them, I'll accept marriage--but I'll still resent the 'license'."

"Why?"

"Because of its hypocrisy. There's a social penalty on unlicensed motherhood, but the same kind of fatherhood is considered a joke--or a badge of manly vigor. Because of that recognized 'manly vigor', today, the prostitutes on Seattle's 'Skid Row' have tacit licenses to see their passions. And down through the ages women have used them as bargaining commodities, to buy the 'protection' of wifehood--have demanded a bill-of-sale, in the form of a marriage license!"

"No," he smiled; "little people--the cheap, the vulgar--have degraded both sex and marriage. But only for themselves, and for those who think like them. And the fact doesn't affect either of us, Jean."

"It affects me. Because of it I prefer to--to retain my amateur status, let's say, until I'm ready for motherhood."

But I have passions--and, unfortunately, your thoughtful society has failed to provide women with 'skid rows'!"

Bart chuckled. "Women have managed to get along, though--so far. Even the double standard hasn't handicapped 'em, I'd say."

"Why should it? Why should they deny their womanhood--when no man denies his manhood? ~~Science~~--birth control--has removed the penalty of unwanted motherhood. So even the 'moral' issue--if there actually is one--no longer hinges on that. It's just the old taboos--a moral code that's dead, and ought to be buried!"

"Marriage and the home--the family--aren't dead," he stated. "Society couldn't exist without agencies to protect its children."

"Then, why doesn't society do something about them? Why doesn't it recognize and admit that the old rules and restraints are ~~obsolete~~? Why don't thinking people develop a new code, based on common sense?"

"Marriage still takes care of the children," he said. "Birth control has allowed married women to enter the professions, and divorces take care of the marriage failures. The old code still works, Jean."

"Fiddlesticks!" she exclaimed. "Divorce has become a racket--and you know it. Birth Control has fostered our great national institution of week-end honeymooning. And what about women who can't achieve marriage--or don't want it? What about the delayed marriage age--for educational, economic, military and other reasons? And teachers, nurses, salesgirls, stenographers, hundreds of others--would you

recommend the canting, rationalistic hypocrisy of so-called 'sublimation' for them?"

"No, I wouldn't."

"And is it possible, Bart, that you've overlooked the fact that top society levels--aristocracies--have always been 'superior' to sex-taboos, even when they sanctioned marriage for the protection of their children?"

"That's true, to a certain degree," he admitted. "The middle classes have always been the strongholds of morality. But not being spectacular or sensational, they just didn't get advertised--that's all."

"The point is, though," she insisted, "that middle-class passions have always been fenced by moral codes--which applied to nobody else. Lower-class morals have never mattered--that's the reason for the 'skid rows'. And the upper classes have not needed them. They could afford mistresses, morganatic marriages--and 'favorites'."

"That 'class' argument doesn't prove anything, though," he said. "It just shows--"

"Oh--doesn't it? What about today's middle classes?"

"Well--what about 'em?"

"What does your middle-class unmarried man--or your retired business man', married or unmarried, for that matter--do when he wants a woman?"

Bart knew the answer. "Well--you tell me, Jean."

"He picks a 'decent' middle-class girl. One he's not ashamed to be seen with--who's willing to be 'seduced', or who has the courage of her convictions. And society doesn't care--so long as they keep it sub rosa. Aren't those

'respectable' middle-class violations the best proof that the old morality is dead?"

"Well--they show it's pretty anemic, anyway."

Jean smiled. "Let's say it's 'moribund'."

He opened the car door and they got out. He asked: "What will take its place, Jean? Free love?"

"If you mean promiscuity--no. We need morals--sane ones--as agents of social control."

They walked up the road, came to a pile of logs beside it and sat down. He asked: "What would you call 'sane morals'?"

"A more flexible code for couples who aren't considering parenthood, for one thing. There's already a clandestine code--a de facto one, operating clandestinely. You recognized it yourself, Bart--with Lois and Post Office."

"I guess you're right, at that," he said thoughtfully. "The fact that sex-morals are sneered at, joked about, and flaunted more-or-less openly--the obvious hypocrisies of the old code--does more harm to society than the violations of it, I imagine."

"Justified ridicule of one form of social control tends to break down respect for all forms of it."

He drew her to him and kissed her. Jean murmured: "We need a new code, Bart..."

He kissed her again. "We need each other now, though."

Jean got up. "Smoke another cigarette," she said. "I can't think--when you make love to me."

"Do you have to think?"

"Yes. I want us to understand each other."

He lit the cigarette, and she sat down again. "All right," he said. "What about your new code, Jean?"

"It's already evolving, on the bases of de facto relationships. Birth control has made them easy--without the penalty of unwanted parenthood--and nothing can stop them. Why not admit the fact? Why keep up the hypocritical hush-hush about it?"

"We already have advocates of trial marriage, companionate marriage, and free love," he reminded her. "Would you provide for them in your 'more flexible code'?"

"They're already in operation. Thousands of couples marry without having children--and that's companionate marriage. One out of every six marriages end in divorce--which certainly shows the relationship was trial-and-error, Bart. And free love--is amateur competition for legalized prostitution, in most cases."

Bart laughed. "Not all cases, though. You're going to share a room with me on this trip, Jean, ~~of your own free~~ will. And there's no question of competition."

"I haven't said I would."

He pulled her to her feet and kissed her again. "But you are....And right now, woman, you're being dragged--symbolically--to my cave! The symbolism is our sole concession to civilization!"

He had picked her up and was carrying her through the pines.

"Bart--let me down! Don't be silly!"

"I've the wisdom--the precedent--of a million years for this, my dear. And you don't want down anyway!"

Jean giggled. "I'm practically thrilled to death--but not with passion," she said. "I'm afraid you'll drop me!"

II

Out of sight from the road, he sat down under a big yellow pine and held her on his lap. Jean put her arms around his neck and kissed him. She murmured: "Do you know what I'm thinking, Bart?"

"What, dear?"

"There be three things which are too wonderful for me, yea, four, which I know not," she quoted: "The way of an eagle in the air, the way of a serpent upon a rock, the way of a ship in the midst of the sea....and the way of a man with a maid..."

"You make me feel--humble, Jean."

"I don't want you to feel that way....But I do want you to understand....As an adult woman I want--and need--my rightful heritage of the emotional experience which has meant so much to the race. And I'm proud to share it with you, Bart...as a man I could accept to father my children..."

"I do understand," he muttered. "I've told you I love you, Jean....I honor and respect you--more than I can tell you. I'm going to teach you to love me."

"I want to love you--why can't I?"

He knew the answer--Boonville. He said: "Don't think about it--just let me love you."

She murmured: "Yes....just love me...."

But he knew that the 'way of a man with a maid'--with an inexperienced one like Jean--can lead to frustration. And he knew, too, that she would keep the memory of the

experience as a symbol--which must not be distorted or tarnished....

He held her close and kissed her, caressed her gently, until she no longer shrank from the unaccustomed intimacy of his hands--until her eager lips told him that she too was ready for fulfilment....

They were atuned physically and emotionally; both were young and vital; and both had been building a dam of restraint. When it broke, the release of emotional tension was tremendous--and complete--for both of them. It left them limp in each other's arms. They clung to each other afterwards, recharging each other with vitality.

Presently Jean murmured: "I never dreamed....it could be like that...."

He kissed her. "It couldn't be--for anybody else but us...We're made for each other--we complete each other."

Finally she got up and brushed the pine needles from her dress. Bart got up and helped her. He said: "I should have brought a blanket. There's one in the car."

"It doesn't matters."

She smiled at him--put her arms around his neck and kissed him. She said: "Well--Jean Taylor, of Boonville, has 'committed adultery', Bart! And she's proud that she had the courage to do it--that she did it without a single qualm of conscience--that she doesn't have to grovel mentally any longer to Boonville's vulgarity, hypocrisy, and ignorance!"

He held her close. "Can't you forget about Boonville, dear--and think about us?"

"I hate Boonville!" she cried passionately. "I want to break every strand of its slimy web around my mind! I'd like to send it a telegram--that I've 'committed adultery'!"

Bart smiled. "You haven't though, dear. You've just committed 'fornication'. And that isn't even mentioned in the Ten Commandments. The only penalty for it, if I remember my Old Testament, was that he had to marry her--and I'm pretty anxious to pay the penalty!"

Jean smiled herself. "No--he could 'pay money according to the dowry of virgins'. In other words, he could pay her father for the privilege of 'lying with her'. But Boonville doesn't know the difference between 'adultery' and 'fornication', anyway."

They started back to the car. "A lot of people don't know the difference," he said. "Do you realize that mere ignorance of the real meaning of the word 'adultery', coupled with its presence in the Ten Commandments, has kept millions from breaking our sex-code?"

"I do--and to those millions God was an anthropomorphic tribal deity--with whiskers! He was Jehovah--who sanctioned Sarah's breeding her maid Hagar to Abraham. Who afterwards approved of Sarah's casting Hagar and Ishmael out--to die of starvation and thirst in the wilderness!"

Bart chuckled. "Would it have made any difference if they believed he had webbed feet--and a couple of pectoral fins--so long as he served as an explanation and a moral restraint?"

"What do you mean?"

"Poor old Boonville still needs its Jehovah, dear.

It--and other places like it--haven't achieved anything to take Jehovah's place. He's 'the Father' to them, and they forget that Christ said: 'God is love....'"

At Lake Crescent he signed the hotel register with a flourish--as 'Mr. and Mrs. Chester Potratz, Utopia, Mont.'

In their room Jean said: "For Pete's sake, Bart--why did you pick that terrible name? And why did you have to smirk as you signed it?"

"Nobody could question a 'Potratz's' morals," he told her. "Or a 'Chester's', for that matter. I smirked because I feel that way. Why shouldn't I?"

"Well," she confessed, "I smirked a little--mentally--myself. But I don't like to be 'Mrs. Chester Potratz'!"

"Merely a temporary hardship, my dear--and mental smirking is the highest form of cerebration! Tomorrow night you can choose our appellation, if you care to."

They planned to spend the following night at Lake Quinault. They had already had dinner. Bart said: "Shall we go out and look at the lake--or go to bed? The lake will be there tomorrow--incidentally."

"So it will," she smiled. "Let's go to bed."

But she insisted on undressing in the dark--to his seeming indignation. "That's cheating, Jean!" he declared. "Why don't you give a guy a break?"

"Get away from that light switch, Bart!"

"Hell--do I have to undress in the dark? I'm not ashamed of my manly physique, even if you are!"

"Mine isn't 'manly'--and I'm not ashamed of it either!"

"Then why the false modesty, my dear?"

"Do we have to discuss it?"

It was Boonville, he realized--and he wanted her to forget Boonville.

As she lay in his arms, she murmured: "I wish this trip could be a vicarious atonement, Bart--for all the soured, sex-starved, neurotic old-maid school teachers in the world.. For the ones who have wanted to share passion--and have never even had an opportunity to...."

"They need more than a vicarious atonement. They need fewer sneers--a public opinion that admits they're human beings."

"I would have been one of them in a year or two...."

She was a bundle of nerves already, he realized. What she needed was a normal way of life--not merely an occasional release of emotional tension....He held her closer, until she shrank again from his insistant man's caresses.

"What's the matter, dear?" he murmured. "Are you afraid of me?"

"No--it's just Boonville....And it's humiliating--to be this way."

"What you need is a lot of good old horse-and-buggy loving--like this!"

Jean laughed. "You sound so--so smugly experienced! For a cent I'd slap you!"

"Go ahead--and I'll spank you!"

She laughed again--and slapped him. They scuffled for a few moments. Then he pinioned her arms. He said: "By the way, Jean--what was it the governor of North Carolina said to that other goop?"

She giggled. "It wouldn't be--maidenly for me to

tell you, Bart!"

"I'll bet you're blushing."

"I am."

"O. K., I'll turn on the lights."

"Turn them on then--brute!"

He reached over and pressed the switch. Jean sat up. made a face at him.

He said: "It's a gyp. You aren't blushing."

"I am--I'm blushing mentally!"

He looked at her for a few moments. "You're the loveliest thing in the world, Jean."

She kissed him lightly. "It's my nightgown. I bought it especially for you!"

"It's tops--but I'd dispense with it without protest."

"Now--I am shocked!"

"Why?"

"Boonville--isn't a nudist colony." Then she giggled. "Let's go back there and start one, Bart!"

"You'd need a hell of a lot of practice first," he grinned, wriggling out of his pajama coat. "But we can start that right now."

"Bart--stop it! Heavens!"

"What woman--what a woman! Are you going to tell me what that damned governor said?"

"Not tonight."

"All right--I'll tickle you!"

She struggled and kicked, finally bit his arm until he released her. As she examined the arm contritely, he said: "Nice legs, Jean. You ought to advertise 'em more."

She laughed, and scrambled back under the covers....

III

Afterwards the girl sobbed gently in his arms; he held her close--realized the tears were a further release of tension for her. Presently she slipped out of bed and felt around for her robe. When she sat down on the edge of the bed, Bart got up too.

He said: "Shall I turn on the light?"

"No, let's just sit here in the dark."

He found his own bath robe and sat down beside her. The girl's thoughts were racing madly, he realized. He put his arms around her and waited....

"I want children--dozens of them!" she exclaimed. "I want them to be strong and honest....I want them to think things out for themselves--not be afraid to think--not be afraid to love...."

He said huskily: "They'll be like you, Jean--beautiful and intelligent...They couldn't help being that way...."

She did not answer for a few moments. Then she exclaimed "Why do people have to make love-making cheap--sordid--vulgar! Even the Bible cheapens it--as though God Himself had made a mistake...As though Christ needed a virgin-birth..."

Presently she arose and snapped on the light. She smiled at him, ruffled his hair. "Poor Bart! He thinks I'm completely daffodilly--another Ophelia. And I'm--simply ravenously hungry!"

By some instantaneous--and to him, inexplicable--mental jump she had achieved an emotional equilibrium, and with it a complete change of mood. Now she was hungry!

The speed of it made him a little hysterical himself. He wanted to laugh--was afraid to.

He said: "There's an all-night joint down by the lake. Shall we get dressed--and sample a few hot dogs?"

She simply yearned for hot dogs. As they dressed in the dark--he had forgot to protest when she switched off the lights--she blamed him for the darkness!

"Why don't you dress in the bath room, Bart? Haven't you any consideration for your blushing--mistress?"

"It might start a precedent--Mrs. Potratz. And how can I 'consider' you--with the lights off?"

They stayed at Lake Crescent until noon next day, then left for Lake Quinault.

Bart said: "We'll make it before dark--nothing to it."

Quinault was only a hundred and seventy-odd miles distant--on the map. But when they reached Forks, thirty-six miles from Lake Crescent, rain was coming down in a slow drizzle. And there the 'improved' road stopped--became two ominous black lines on the map.

"Been rainin' over here a week," the filling station man told them. "Them roads down the coast is plenty bad. You'll never make it to Quinault."

"I've got chains," Bart said. "We'll make it, all right."

"You'll high-center, mister. I know them roads--you don't."

"How about it, Jean?" Bart asked. "Shall we go back to Crescent?"

"I hate to. Don't you?"

The filling station man grinned at them. "You two honeymoonin'?"

Bart said: "We are."

"I've got a cabin you can use--it's about five miles up that gulch," the man said. "It's clean--got everything you'll need. And it's a damned sight better place for honeymoonin' than them lake hotels. Would you be interested?"

Bart looked at Jean. She said: "Let's take it."

The man said: "It'll be a dollar a night--for the rest of the summer, if you want it."

He gave Bart a key, and instructions for reaching the cabin. Jean was making a list of groceries--sheets and pillow-cases, whatever they were likely to need.

The man said: "You can buy your stuff right there--at Knuckles' store." He grinned at them again and added, "Good honeymoonin', folks."

Bart said: "Thanks, mister." Jean blushed--the man had glanced at her left hand.

After buying the other things, they went to the only restaurant--the town had no butcher shop--and Bart talked the proprietor into selling them half-a-dozen steaks, 'hot-dogs', and two tasty-looking pies.

"Now--are we all set, Jean?"

"How about candles--and soap and towels?"

"Forgot 'em--write 'em down. And matches and smokes. I wonder if that guy left an axe up there--guess he did. How about lard or something to cook with?"

"We have it--and butter. But--we have no syrup, for hot cakes!"

"Can you make 'em?"

"I certainly can! I can make better pies than those, too!"

He grinned. "Shoe me, sister!"

They made the new purchases, piled them with the others in the back of his coupe. She said: "Goodness--I hope we haven't forgotten anything."

"If we have--we can come back and get it, Mrs. Potratz."

"Obviously--and I'm not 'Mrs. Potratz'!"

"Just a little housewife at heart, thought," he smiled.

The floor of the canyon the man had indicated was densely forested. It lifted rapidly, and a fair-sized creek tumbled down it. The rain still fell, in a thick, fog-like mist. As they followed the road through the big trees, Jean thought of Lanier's 'glooms of the live oaks'--but the dripping moss-draped conifers were Douglas spruce. Their thick-laced branches shut out the sky; the walls of the canyon drew together and shut out the rest of the world; and to Jean--exultant because she was, at last, shaping her own destiny--every turn of the road was like the closing of a door on her past....

Finally they reached the cabin. It stood on a little rise beside the creek, almost hidden in the big trees. The cliff-wall of the canyon arose behind it; and below it a separate pinnacle of granite heaved itself up through the trees, its top almost hidden in the mist. The cabin itself was made of logs, had a stone chimney.

As Bart fumbled with the key to the door, Jean murmured: "Isn't it wonderful!"

"Barring pack-rats--it's a pip!"

He got the door open. "No rats--we'd smell 'em," he said. There were shutters on the windows; the place was pitch-dark. Bart struck a match.

"It has furniture--it's just perfect!" she exclaimed. "I'll get the candles--you build a fire, Bart. We'll have to sweep it--and dust it--and scrub it. But--it's heavenly!"

The candles showed details. The room was comfortably furnished, even to a couch, an overstuffed chair, and a battery radio. Jean gloated over them for a few moments, then ran to the car and began bringing in the supplies; Bart started a fire in the big fireplace.

As he did so, he smiled complacently....

IV

The floor did not need scrubbing, Jean decided. She swept it and dusted the place. Then she remembered that Bart had a roll of blankets--his fishing bed-roll--in the back of the car. With these and their sheets and pillowcases she made up the bed. Bart had started a fire in the lean-to kitchen stove. Jean sent him to the creek for water, to wash the dishes. He got the water, but protested about the dishes.

"Heck, gal--they've been washed," he said. "What's the use in washing 'em again?"

Jean laughed. "You wouldn't know," she said. "There's an axe--run along and chop some more wood, dear. By that time the water will be boiling."

He chopped the wood and stacked it beside the fireplace. Then he tinkered with a gasoline lamp until he got it lighted.

Odors of cooking were coming from the kitchen; he stood in the doorway and watched Jean preside over the stove.

"Goodness--don't just stand there!" she exclaimed. "Isn't there--can't you be doing something?"

"I am doing something. I'm a hungry primitive gentleman of leisure, at the moment, observing his woman--with amazement and apprehension--as she cooks his dinner."

"You--just think you are! Those dishes have to be washed--here's the pan. And here's hot water--and there's soap and dish towels, Mr. Lily-of-the-Field!"

"Slave driver! Why can't I stand here and just adore you? What are a few dishes--that are already washed--compared to stark adoration?"

She rolled two steaks in batter and plopped them into a hot frying pan. Then she wiped her hands on the flour-sack dish towel she wore as an apron.

"Those steaks will be chicken-fried and served with mushrooms, Bart--and adoration isn't going to pay for them. You wash those dishes!"

He kissed the flour smudge on her nose--washed and dried the dishes. "Now you can set the table," she said. "Ours is strickly a co-operative economy."

And after he had set the table--and had reset it because he had left off the table cloth--had gone to the creek for more water, and had restoked the fire, Jean chased him from the kitchen.

"How do you expect a person to cook---with a big, hungry ox staring at her? Go smoke a cigarette--or play the radio!"

He accepted his banishment--tinkered with the battery radio until it began to blare a news-cast from Seattle. Jean came in and ruffled his hair, kissed him on the forehead.

She said: "You may adore me now, dear--but dinner is ready."

He swept her off her feet and carried her back into the kitchen. He said: "I'm versatile--I can adore and eat at the same time!"

The steaks were good ones to start with; Jean had known how to cook them. He said: "If you'll quit teaching and be my cook--I'll even go so far as to marry you, my dear."

Jean smiled. "The inducement is stupendous--but I'm not ready to get married."

After they had washed the dishes, he went out to get their bags. "It's raining cats and dogs--and all we need now is a cat and a dog," he said as he kicked the door shut behind him. "Shall we adopt a couple of 'em?"

"They're fighting, on that tin roof.....Isn't it wonderful, Bart?"

"It suits me....And that wind in the pines, as we came up the gulch--that was your 'eerie music'."

"It was 'soughing'," she said. "Bart, I actually believe you're a sensualist."

"What's wrong with that?"

"Nothing. You're an honest one--and so am I...."

He pulled the couch in front of the fire. They sat toasting their feet, listening to the wind and rain. Presently Jean got up and opened the door. She said: "I heard something--there it is again!"

It came from the rim of the canyon--a ghostly, plaintive yelping. Bart said: "Just a coyote. He's probably out looking for his lady-friend."

"Poor thing," she murmured. Then a vigorous series of yips from the floor of the canyon answered those on the rim. Jean closed the door.

"It's all right," she said. "This is a sane world, after all, Bart."

CHAPTER XIX

I

They decided to spend a week at the cabin--stretched it to two. Jean had brought two traveling cases--and a portable typewriter. She was well fixed for clothes. And Bart's 'fishing duds'--a terrible old hat, patched riding trousers, flannel shirt, and hobnailed boots--had been rolled up in his blankets. Jean accused him of bringing them with premeditation.

"Merely standard equipment," he assured her blandly. He also produced fishing tackle, a twenty-two rifle, binoculars, a ukulele--belonging to his kid brother, he said--and other miscellaneous 'standard equipment'.

One morning--she had driven to Forks for supplies--Jean found several bobby pins and a feminine handkerchief on the ledge behind the car seat.

"That handkerchief isn't mine--and those bobby pins belong to a blonde!" she accused. "So you're just a Don Juan after all, Bart."

"Sorry," he grinned, "you'll have to charge 'em up to the activities of my kid brother, I'm afraid. He's been using that car to tom-cat around in all summer."

Jean laughed. "Your more-or-less checkered past is none of my business anyway," she said. "I've merely--squatter's rights to your present."

"What about my future--our future, Jean?"

"It's something to think about," she admitted.

But she did not want to talk about it, he realized.

When it stopped raining, he discarded the fishing clothes for a pair of trunks and sneakers. Jean laughed at him, said he looked like Mohandas Gandhi--without a safety-pin.

"I scorn Gandhi--and his safety pin," he said. "What's wrong with this outfit? Hell, woman, I'm not deformed--even if you are!"

"I'm not deformed either--I'd have you know!"

He chuckled. "You act like it. Why don't you put on a pair of shorts--and give your legs a chance to see the world?"

Jean had bought a pair, with a 'halter'--they were being worn in Seattle that summer. But she had lacked the courage to put them on. Goaded by his jibes, however, she chased him into the kitchen and dug them out of her bag. But when she had slipped out of her clothes, she saw him standing in the kitchen doorway.

She snatched her dress--glared at him for a moment. Then she threw down the dress and stood defiant.

"Well, am I deformed--Mr. Peeping-Tom Wilson?"

"I'll say you aren't!" he muttered reverently. "How can you be ashamed of beauty like that? It's--sacrilege to be."

She slipped on the shorts and tied the halter over her breasts. "I'm not ashamed of it," she said. "My mind tells

me not to be....It's just Boonville--and I'll wear these shorts if it kills me!"

"Atta gal! That ledge is a good place for a sun-tan--and to hell with Boonville!"

Taking blankets to lie on, they climbed the pinnacle to a broad ledge and stretched out in the sun. Jean got used to the shorts, wore them as casually as Bart wore his.

From the first evening she established a routine of housekeeping, and followed it religiously. Bart's jobs were getting firewood, building the firest of mornings, bringing water from the creek, dumping the garbage into the pit for its disposal. Occasionally she let him set the table and dry the dishes; ~~but when~~ when he offered to wash them, citing to her the much-heralded penalty of chapped hands, Jean scoffed.

"You don't know how to wash them--and who's afraid of chapped hands, anyway?"

But despite the fact that she washed their clothes--over his protest--scrubbing them on an old board she found hanging under the eaves of the cabin, her hands did not chap. Bart found that she was using a highly advertised brand of lotion.

"Pulchritudinous pedagogue preserves petal-like paws for posterity!" he said. "You should write 'em about it, Jean--and win ten thousand dollars."

She insisted on covering the fire after they had gone to bed. "Where the heck did you learn that trick?" he asked. "Don't they have matches in Boonville?"

"Why fiddle around with matches and kindling, when you can have live coals--and heat? I saw my father cover the

fire--when we needed one--for eighteen years, Bart."

And she saved the scraps from their meals--put them on a flat rock behind the cabin, for the squirrels. Presently the animals were frisking about the place, scampering over the roof and up and down trees, as unconcernedly as park squirrels. He learned that Jean had saved scraps for her dog and cat--for eighteen years...

As he studied Jean, discovered new facets of her being almost hourly, Bart could see there were thousands of associations, habits, and thought-patterns which still linked her to Boonville. And only a few--magnified by her imagination--which repelled her from it. But only time, he realized, could soften her perspective and dull the sharp edge of her memories.

"You spoke of visiting your folks next summer." he said one night, as they sat in front of the fire. "Do you still plan to?"

"I would--if I could take you with me," she said. "I'd like to flaunt you in the face of Boonville! I'd like to show it I'm no longer sniveling and pining for Sam Baron--that I'm no longer bound by the place's hypocrisy. I wish I had a dozen men--to parade in front of it!"

He smiled. "You might rent eleven more--strictly as supernumeraries, though. I happen to be prejudiced against polyandry."

Jean laughed. "It wouldn't be polyandry--I wouldn't marry 'em. I'd just call a town meeting and announce that I was living in 'multiple-fornication'--with all twelve!"

He chuckled. "That should take care of Boonville--adequately, I'd say. But--would you want your father and

mother to know about it?"

"No, I wouldn't....My father--he just wouldn't understand it. And it would hurt him....My mother--would say, "I told you she'd come to no good end, Jud Taylor!"

"That doesn't mean it wouldn't hurt her, though."

"It would hurt her, but--she doesn't care for me, Bart. She never has cared for me. And I--can't understand why."

"Maybe she does care for you."

"If she does, why didn't she help me--and write to me--when I needed a mother more than anything else in the world?" the girl asked bitterly. "I dared to disobey her once...And everything that happened to me is 'God's just punishment'--to make me repent and tell her I'm sorry. Until I do that, to use her own words, 'I've made my bed--now I can lie in it'!"

"What did you do, Jean?"

She told him about the Delphian meeting. "Mamma was just trying to bend me to her will--as she had bent my father, because he loved her," Jean said. "And I just wouldn't let her."

"But she was brought up to believe that mothers' commands are final dictums, wasn't she?" he asked. "Could she have changed her mind about that?"

"No, I don't suppose she could...."

He let her think that over. Then he said: "If she was set in her thinking then--mentally helpless--she must be more so now, Jean. And you aren't--mentally helpless."

She gazed into the fire. Presently she murmured: "Maybe I shouldn't be so bitter about it...."

II

After Bart had gone to sleep, Jean got up and remade the fire. She sat in front of it and thought about the strange woman who was her mother....She had never understood Mary, and Mary had never understood her....

Mary's set patterns of ideas had made her thinking as rigid as granite, Jean realized--and Mary herself was granite...Not a pebble of it, smoothed and polished by experience, capable of rolling in the stream of life; but a rough hunk of it--a chunk of primitive human nature.

Mentally, the girl could see now, her mother was almost elemental. Her thought-processes were simple; they harked back to the primitive driving forces which had enabled man to survive. And they were strong....Jean remembered that people have named such forces 'character'....

The girl had always felt that she was Judson's child; that the accident of birth had made Mary her mother--without giving her a heritage from Mary....The realization came as a shock to her that she was more Mary's child than his--that it was her mother's primitive stubbornness which was driving her to survive mentally--to a survival which Judson had lacked the 'character' to attain....

For Mary had survived mentally, Jean could see now. In everything that mattered to her, Mary had lived her own life as she had wanted to live it....And through it all she had leaned on the static comfort of her inviolate religion--her 'Rock of Ages'....That too was a complement--an indispensable attribute--to the granite in her mother's nature..

"'Honor thy father and thy mother'," the girl thought wisely....She could honor her mother now...Both Mary and Judson had done the best they could. Mary certainly had 'done her duty as she saw it'....Why couldn't she have loved her child--when the child needed and wanted love?

Jean re-covered the fire and slipped back into bed...

III

Next morning, apropos of nothing--he had learned to expect that--she asked: "Bart, were you in the World War?"

"Sure--for three months," he grinned. "But the Germans must have heard me coming--they folded up while I was at Camp Lewis. And such, my love, was the simple saga of my service."

"So you didn't bring the Kaiser's head back on a platter! No, that was Salome--and I'm thinking of Mademoiselle from Armentieres!"

He chuckled. "I didn't bring her back either--if that's what's worrying you. And I'd never heard before that Salome bagged the Kaiser!"

"Don't be dense. A lot of people brought her back."

"Brought who back? For Pete's sake--Salome?"

"Say 'whom'--and don't grin like a chessy-cat! I'm serious."

"All right--'whom' brought who back?"

"Mademoiselle from Armentieres--stupid! They still sing about her. She 'did her bit'--helped them 'save the world for Democracy', Bart. And that justifies her."

"I don't get it."

"It still justifies her--and others like her," Jean declared. "It has removed the stigmas of 'chippie' and 'whore' from 'amateurs'; it has made them 'just good sports'. Isn't that true?"

"Well--more or less."

"So-called 'morality' surveys--and 'Flaming Youth', which hasn't stopped, except on the surface--prove it," she insisted. "And that means Mademoiselle from Armentieres has done more to shape our morals since the World War than all the preachers and moralists."

"Go on--I'm listening."

"The thousands who beat a path to Mademoiselle's door found no fences," she stated. "And those same thousands--most of them 'middle-class'--came back to every village and hamlet in the country. They came back singing of Mademoiselle; they glorified her, made her a prototype. She became the 'man's woman', the 'good sport'--that scorns moral fences."

"Well, it worked that way at first, I guess."

"It's still working. The women at home became jealous of Mademoiselle--and they fought fire with fire. Women are realists, when it comes to men--and champions of expediency. But the point is that Mademoiselle became established as a type, Bart."

"So what?"

"So--the broken fences, and a crumbling moral code."

"Maybe you're right, at that. A lot of fellows I know married Mademoiselles--who get drunk and step out with other guys. No 'respectable' woman--married or unmarried--did that when we were kids."

"But Mademoiselle just hastened evolution," she said. "One of these days we'll have another war--and other Mademoiselles, and more broken fences. Then, maybe, we'll start building a sane morality."

He looked at her speculatively. "Why wait for another war? Why not write out your ideas, Jean, and send 'em to a good magazine?"

She laughed at that. "Heavens--no magazine would take them! They'd shock the readers--would cut down circulation--would reduce advertising rates--heavens, Bart! Would you have me smack my head against the wall of economic determinism?"

"Don't be so damned cynical. There are thousands of people who would welcome a little sane thinking on morals, and the magazines know it. You write the article; I'll pick the place to send it."

Ignoring her protests, he got out her typewriter. "There are a few sheets of paper," he said. "I'll go to Forks and get you a package of it."

After he had gone, she sat down--rolled a sheet of paper into the typewriter. She wrote "MADEMOISELLE FROM ARMENTIERES"--and could think of nothing else...She went out and fed the squirrels--chucked a pine cone at one for calling her names--came back and sat down again. She began to type rapidly...She wrote:

"Two primordial cells, floating--drifting purposelessly--in the Archaeozoic sea....Two microscopic blobs of jelly, in an inorganic world--brought together by blind chance; held together, perhaps, by chemical or electrical attraction--joini

their infinitesimal stores of energy blindly, because they must, in the beginnings of co-reproduction....Mating....

"A paleolithic, adolescent boy and girl--snarling at each other over a bone cast aside by the Big One....She snatches it and runs with it into the forest--he chases her, overtakes her, snarls at her and beats her with his fists; she bites and scratches him, jibbers at him shrilly...Then, suddenly, he clutches her to him--and she no longer resists... They are drawn blindly, irresistibly, together....Mating...

"They sneak back to the fire guiltily--vaguely conscious that he has usurped the prerogative of the Big One, but afraid to leave his protection and that of the fire... One day he sees them stealing away together--tries to kill the boy--banishes him from the fire....Maybe the girl slips out and joins the boy; maybe she chooses the security of the Big One, and of the fire....Morality...."

Jean considered the last paragraph. She did not like the idea of the girl's choosing security--but had to admit that the girl probably had done so....Could that have been the beginnings of prostitution?

No, she decided; for the Big One's will determined the only 'morals' that existed in the group....Certainly, it would have been more 'moral' for the girl to stay with him....

But Jean wanted the paleolithic damsel to be immoral! The idea of her staying with the Big One--of sharing him with her own mother and sisters--was nauseating...Unable to call the girl 'immoral', however, Jean stigmatized her as an economic determinist....

Then she realized that the boy would become stronger tha

his father eventually, would kill him, and would appropriate his entire herd of wives--the girl, who was his sister in the first place, his mother and his other sisters! Primitive mating, Jean thought, was not so 'free and clean' as she had imagined...

But it finally dawned on her that she was judging it in terms of her Twentieth-Century code. Considered impersonally, she realized, primitive mating was all that she--or even Boonville--had a right to expect of it.

She added another paragraph, showing the cycle of Big Ones--making it clear that society had evolved and was still held together through the direct or indirect motivation of the mating instinct.

When Bart returned, she had finished her historical panorama and had started dissecting the modern code of sex-morals. Bart chuckled as he read what she had written.

"'Atta gal, Jean--you tell 'em!"

IV

She let him get lunch. He had to pry her away from the typewriter to eat it. And she ate without knowing what the food was--without remembering even, that he had cooked it. He marveled at her intensity of concentration, smiled to himself that people should call it 'absent-mindedness'. With Jean, he could see, it was a white heat of cerebration.

She returned to the typewriter, and he did the dishes. Then he donned his trunks. "Going to pass up our sun-tan today?" he smiled.

"Couldn't you--take it for both of us?"

As he lay on the ledge, a little forlorn because it was

the first time he had been there without Jean, Bart realized that he had started a creative flame in her which must be trimmed and fed....The bitterness and cynicism must be trimmed to purposeful iconoclasm; the fuel must be more than a desire to spite Boonville....

Presently she joined him, bringing the manuscript. She said: "I've struck a snag. I want you to help me."

"What's the trouble?"

"Marriage," she said. "It should be limited to its real purpose, as the institution of parenthood and home-making. And I'd make the marriage laws even stricter than they are--put a premium on motherhood and fatherhood. The race has the right to demand standards of parenthood which do not apply to the 'more flexible' relationships."

"That's fair enough. What's the hitch to it?"

"What about the 'tired business man'--tired of his wife, anyway--who week-ends with his secretary?" she asked. "Would you put them in the same category with unmarried couples? Or with engaged couples who can't get married for financial reasons?"

"I wouldn't. I'd make him get a divorce and marry the secretary--or quit week-ending with her. By doing that, by the clandestine relationship, he's breaking down marriage as the home-making institution."

"But suppose neither he nor his wife wants a divorce. Suppose both knew the only reason for the week-ends is physical attraction--and the secretary is satisfied with the fur coats she's getting out of it. Wives do wink at such relationships, don't they? And when there are children,

aren't they more likely to?"

"Yes, wives want security, for themselves and for their children," he admitted. "And the 'office wife' may be pretty crazy about her boss--rather than the fur coats--for that matter."

"But--would you insist on a divorce, and break up a home, against their wills? Or would you stretch the new code to cover 'office wives' and week-ends? Or--what?"

"Can any code, or law, ever eliminate them?"

"They haven't eliminated prostitution. And that existed in Bible times, when they didn't need it--they had polygamy."

"What about the ones who couldn't support a wife--or wives?"

"They needed prostitution, I suppose. But the wealthy classes practiced it. If you remember, Judah paid his daughter-in-law--her name was Tamar--a 'kid from the flock' when she played the role of 'an harlot' for him."

He smiled at that. "I'll take your word for it--but let's get back to the 'office wives'. Why not try to figure 'em out on the bases of human nature and the real purpose of marriage--which is for the children?"

"I can't. Human nature says he wants the 'office wife'; the old code says he shouldn't have her--and she's practically an institution, anyway!"

"In other words--polygamy."

"Yes--and we already have it. Multiple marriages, like those practiced in Hollywood, are polygamy. People won't admit it, because the marriages aren't 'simultaneous'."

"That's true," he said thoughtfully. "And I'm wondering, Jean, if we can do anything about the 'extra-curricular' affairs, except to point out that they are evolving into 'moral' trial marriages and companionate marriages. Your 'office wife' is actually 'companionate bigamy'. And they're already de facto, as you said the other day. Public opinion, by failing to condemn them, is making them 'moral'."

"But they're breaking down the family," she reminded him. "That's our basic social institution."

"Yes, the family--with children. Not 'the home'--without children. Millions of people don't see the difference Jean--and that's your line of approach, it seems to me. Show 'em what the family does--what it's supposed to do--and what it can do. Remind 'em that if the family breaks down, society will take over the rearing of the children--as they've done in Russia already. And point out the responsibilities--and privileges--of parenthood."

"Bart," she said, "the family itself is changing--so fast it makes us dizzy to think of it. Do you suppose we can save it?"

"We have to save it--or go collective on everything but its biological function. And millions of people, in this country at least, would fight for it--if they realized they have to fight for it. You tell 'em about it, Jean."

CHAPTER XX

I

Jean worked the rest of the afternoon on the article, and he got dinner. It was almost midnight when she finished the last page.

"There--it's done!" she exclaimed. "I'll correct it and copy it tomorrow. Goodness!" She stretched and yawned. "My neck aches, Bart--and I'm hungry."

He had known she would be. "Coffee and sandwiches coming up," he said. He had kept a fire in the kitchen stove. Jean changed to her pajamas while he prepared a tray--noticed when he brought it in that he already had changed to his.

"Poor Bart," she said. "I certainly lead you a dog's life, don't I?"

He grinned. "I hadn't noticed it, dear."

They ate in front of the fireplace. "I have the appetite of an anaconda," she said; "and I don't get fat. Why don't I?"

"You think too much."

"Yes, I've been thinking--while I wrote that thing."

He chuckled. "So I observed."

"But I was thinking of something else," she said.

"Bart, when a person knows something is inevitable--isn't it silly not to accept it?"

"Waste of energy, anyway."

"I hate to admit it, though...You're--just a snake in the grass!"

"No, I'm a blacksnake in a tree--and you're a humming bird!"

"You're a conceited jackass--you think you're so smart! And there'll be no living with you, from now on....Will you marry me, Bart?"

He smiled. "If it's inevitable--there's no use in our struggling against it, dear."

"It is inevitable. We couldn't do without each other now, if we wanted to. And it's just silly for us not to get married. But you planned this trip," she accused, "and made me write that article, too--with deliberate malice aforethought! Didn't you?"

He had planned the trip--but without prejudice.

"No, I didn't," he denied. "This trip needs no apologies so far as I'm concerned--to God, or anybody else. I want you to feel that way about it--always...and if marriage is going to cheapen it for you, if it will be an anticlimax--let's not get married."

He poured her another cup of coffee. Jean gazed into the fire...

"This cabin--is more than a love-nest," she said. "It might be a cave--and that would be more than a love-nest, for us.....The whole thing has--just unfolded, Bart. We've had two weeks of 'trial marriage', and neither of us wants 'companionate marriage' or 'free love'. We aren't--Lois and Post Office."

"We know now that we want the best there is, Jean--for ourselves and for society. And there's no reason for us to settle for less."

"There isn't.....We want a home and children."

They decided to get married in Seattle. As they

packed, Jean said: "I want to teach another year, Bart. If I'm married, the Bennington school board won't let me."

"I think I can talk 'em into it," he said. "Witmer won't object."

Witmer was the Bennington superintendent.

Jean said: "Why tell them about it?"

He chuckled. "They'd probably observe that we were living together, dear."

"We wouldn't be. I'd have to stay in Bennington, and we could see each other week-ends."

"Wouldn't your conscience hurt you about fooling the school board?"

"It certainly wouldn't!" she declared. "The stupidity of keeping a woman from teaching because she's married is more immoral than my deception would be."

"Leaving me alone in Sleeping Child is worse than either, I'd say."

"Folks will start gossiping about us, though. Won't that be thrilling!"

"If some old biddy sees me climbing out of your window--at six o'clock some bright winter morning--it will be catastrophe!"

"You'll do no climbing," she assured him. "You might--get into the wrong room."

They stopped at Forks on the way out. Bart paid the man--his name was Otis--who had rented them the cabin. He grinned at them and wished them luck. As they left, Jean saw him wink at Bart.

"Heavens!" she exclaimed when they were out of earshot. "How disillusioned he would be--if he knew we're on our way to get married!"

"But Mr. Otis approves of us--married or otherwise."

"And if he thinks we aren't--he's another proof of that thing I wrote, Bart."

"He's damned sure we aren't--and is getting a kick out of it. And I imagine the entire metropolis of Forks shares his sentiments."

"Just think," she said. "A few decades ago it might have marched up to the cabin in a body--tarred and feathered us!"

"Not that town," he denied. "Historical facts correct--locale erroneous."

They got a marriage license in Seattle. After they had left the court house, Bart said: "Do you still resent the license idea, Jean?"

"No, I don't....I wish it was stronger. They should have made us prove that we're entitled to have children--not merely to sleep together. With that license the whole thing is tied up in one package--when it shouldn't be."

They found a justice of the peace, who made short work of the ceremony.

"Looks O. K.," he grunted as he examined the license through bifocals. "Well--join hands, you two. Got a ring, mister?"

Jean looked at Bart--they had forgotten the ring!

But he grinned at her and fished one from his pocket--a new one. "How about witnesses?" he asked the man. "Don't

we need one--or two?"

"Esther an' her ma are out in the kitchen--they'll sign it."

But 'Esther' did better than that; she came out on the porch and beamed approval. Jean murmured affirmatives to the questions--forgetting to cross her fingers at the 'obeys'. Then Bart kissed her. They were married....

When they were in the car again, Bart said: "Greetings, Mrs. Wilson--goodby, 'Mrs. Potratz'! It has been a privilege to have known you!"

Jean laughed. "'Chester Potratz' played on my maidenly innocence!" she said. "Will you please explain--Bart Wilson!--why you had the sheer effrontery to get a wedding ring, before consulting me?"

"Hell--I got 'em both!" he admitted. He produced a small square box. Jean saw that it bore the label of a Billings jeweler. "Not that you'd given me an excuse to--you certainly hadn't," he added. "But you can't shoot a man for hoping--and being prepared, dear."

He slipped the diamond on her finger and kissed her again. "It's just a little symbol--pretty hallowed by age and human custom--that a man and a woman have learned they are mates," he said. "And that other ring means their fellows wish them God-speed--good mating--good children."

She murmured: "They mean...everything that mating has meant to humanity...."

II

Jean had to get to Helena in time for Edythe's wedding. Before leaving Seattle, however, Jean and Bart wrote their parents that they were married. Jean's was her first joint-letter to Judson and Mary since she had come to Montana. She decided to keep the news of her marriage as a surprise to her relatives in Helena.

After Edythe's wedding, Bart planned to take Jean to Billings for a few days with his family. She asked: "Wouldn't it be just awful--if they shouldn't approve of me?"

"Terrible! If they don't, I'll have to take you out and shoot you, dear. It's an old Billings custom."

In Spokane he mailed her article to one of the leading women's magazines. Married women, he reasoned, would be more likely to accept Jean's ideas--because the article enhanced their own status, was a plea for the dignity and responsibility of marriage.

"But editors may shy away from it," he warned her. "It's packed with controversial dynamite--in case you'd forgotten."

"I had," she admitted. "I have a husband to worry about--in case you'd forgotten."

When they reached Helena, Edythe almost pitched head-long down the steps to meet them. She had come from the dinner table.

"Hello!" she screamed. "I thought you were the flowers--who is he, Jean? Is he the one you wrote me about? Jonesie--come here! For Pete's sake--why don't you introduce him, Jean?"

Jean laughed. "I'm trying to! Edythe, this is my husband, Bart Wilson."

Edythe stared at them, then shrieked: "Jonesie--come here!" When she had hugged and kissed them both, she burst out laughing. "Jean--how can you be so calm about it? You simply panic me! Jonesie--here's another woman for you to kiss!"

'Jonsie' had come out on the porch. He smiled at Jean and Bart. "I'm Jones Kirk," he said. "Edythe sometimes overlooks the minor formalities."

"She's the woman--and this is her husband--I've forgot his name--and they're just married!" Edythe explained. "Go on--kiss her! I've just kissed her husband--what did you say his name was, Jean?"

Jonesie kissed Jean gravely and shook hands with Bart. "It's the spirit of the thing that counts with Edythe," he said. "Congratulations to both of you."

Edythe clapped her hands. "You did that very nicely, Jonesie--I'm proud of you! Come on in--Mom and Dad will be absolutely petrified! They'll be simply ga-ga! Heavens--are we still here? Come on in!"

Sam and Sally were neither 'petrified' nor 'ga-ga'. But they were pleased, Jean could see. And they approved of Bart....The house was a pandemonium of activity--mostly Edythe's. Sam and Sally had arranged everything. They and Jonesie smiled complacently as Edythe rushed around in an ecstatic dither--doing nothing.

The wedding was set for noon the following day. Jean tried to enter into the spirit of it. But she could not do so.

The whole thing seemed a play to her--a rather trite one--with Edythe doing the acting. Jonesie, Sam, and Sally were lay figures; she and Bart were spectators; and none of the lines meant anything...

After she and Bart had gone to bed that night, she said: "It isn't that I'm jealous of Edythe. All this fuss-and-flutter just doesn't mean anything to me. The whole thing is--almost ritualistic."

"It is ritualistic. It seems like making mud pies to you and me--because we've been living reality," he told her. "Weddings are just re-dramatizations--new actors, repeating old lines. But the lines come from racial experience, even if they do get pretty badly garbled in transit."

"I suppose they do," she murmured. "What do you think of Edythe?"

"That dame's a scream. How did she ever stop to think long enough to pick a guy like Jonesie?"

"Edythe doesn't stop to think; she does it intuitively. She just saw Jonesie--and wanted him--and got him!"

"But you don't 'just get' a fellow like Jonesie," he said. "Did Edythe go through the University intuitively?"

"She never did any studying, never seemed to do any thinking. But she listened in classes--occasionally--crammed a little for tests; and she usually made the honor roll."

"And probably forgot everything she'd learned the day after the tests."

"But she didn't--that's the funny part about her,"

Jean said. "Edythe snatches ideas and stores them up--as the squirrels do nuts--in her subconscious, I suppose. And when she needs one--it's there, and she uses it. She just lives from one minute to the next, without a really worry in the world. I envy her the ability to do it."

"You don't, though--you don't need to envy her," he said. "Edythe may not have a care in the world--but she'll never settle any of its problems, either. The chances are, she'll never even bump up against 'em."

"But if she does bump up against 'em--she'll meet them intuitively."

"No, she'll be forced to develop a defense-mechanism of thinking--or get knocked over, Jean."

"Couldn't she develop it in her subconscious? It seems to me Edythe would do that instinctively."

"Maybe she would--but it would still be in her subconscious," he reminded her. "The dame wouldn't reason it out; she'd just use it--for herself."

"No, she wouldn't reason it out."

"Then, it wouldn't do other people any good," he said. "Edythe wouldn't know how to explain it, if she wanted to."

"But another person might," Jean insisted. "Is there any reason why intuition and creative expression couldn't be present in the same individual? Why couldn't she just dig it from her subconscious and tell people about it? That's what great geniuses have done, isn't it?"

"Maybe a few have," he admitted. "But most of 'em have dug their creations from the hard-pan of experience--with 'an infinite capacity for taking pains'. And your intuitive

'mystic'--just doesn't get across to the mass-mind."

"I see," she murmured. "Maybe, before an idea--a theory, anything creative--can be practical, it has to go through the old, slow, painful process of being shaped by reason..."

"It does--and we've done enough 'shaping' for tonight," he chuckled. "Let's--be practical!"

He held her close. Jean sighed, relaxed in his arms.

"Goodness!" she murmured. "I was beginning to think people like Edythe can 'save' the world by intuition--and it didn't seem fair to let them!"

III

Next morning Jean was thrilled over the wedding--and Edythe was bemoaning its inanities. She dragged Jean upstairs to see her presents--had forgotten to the night before.

"What do you think of our loot?" she asked. "It's rank piracy--or arson, or sabotage--I think! Or maybe it's nepotism, or something. Isn't it silly--for people I never even heard of to send us presents? They're from Mom's and Dad's friends--and from people Jonesie's folks know--and he doesn't--and it just makes me sick!"

"Now we'll have to send things to people we don't know--for the rest of our lives! And most of 'em just when I'm having a baby--and will be in the hospital, and Jonesie will have to pay the bills--and we'll be broke for life!"

Jean laughed. "Bart and I won't have to worry about that, anyway," she said. "We didn't send any announcements."

"I wish we'd had sense enough not to!" Edythe exclaimed. "Then the people we care about would have sent us presents

anyway--and we wouldn't have all this junk--and I wouldn't just shudder every time I address an envelope! Especially, to our 'dear Omega sisters'! I can just hear 'em-- 'Another bid for a present, darlings--from Edythe Taylor! How did she ever manage to hook a man?' It just makes me sick!"

Jean said: "But the cattiness is just a pose with the Omegas--you know how they are. And all of it--the presents, and all the rest--goes with weddings."

"Yes--and that's all Dad's and Mom's doing," Edythe said. "They didn't have a wedding--and they think I want one--and they want me to have one. But I don't--and I can't disillusion them--and Jonesie doesn't either."

"It's wicked, too," she declared, "for it's just making Jonesie and me 'live in sin' that much longer! We are--for we didn't wait--and why should we? Did you and Bart?"

"No, we didn't," Jean said. "When we were sure we wanted to get married, we went to a justice of the peace."

"And that's the way it should be!" Edythe exclaimed. "All this showing a girl off--as though she's a sort of prize heifer at the Montana State Fair--having people goop at her and make cracks--when it's none of their business--it just makes me sick!"

But it didn't make her very sick, Jean realized. Edythe was actually thrilled with every bit of it--but hers and Jonesie's 'living in sin' was another proof that the old moral code was breaking down. Edythe resented the wedding, Jean could see, because she felt it condemned her and

Jonesie for 'pre-honeymooning'--and felt they had a right to 'pre-honeymoon'....

Jean and Bart went to the post office--to mail some of Edythe's after-thought announcements--and met Mr. Witmer, the Bennington school superintendent, in front of it. He shook hands with them.

"Congratulations!" he said. "I've just seen the morning paper."

"We didn't put it there," Bart said. "We just got here last night."

"It was, though. An article about another wedding said 'Mrs. Bartholomew Wilson' would be matron of honor," Witmer explained. "Does that mean I have to dig up another music teacher for next year?"

"Not unless you want to," Jean said. "I want to teach--why can't your silly board let me?"

"They'll argue that Bart's making enough money to support you--and that some other teacher needs your salary worse than you do."

"That doesn't make sense," Jean declared. "If she needs it--she did when they employed me. And they're just penalizing me for getting married."

"That's about the size of it," Witmer admitted. "I'll talk to the board--for we want you. We know what you can do."

Edythe's wedding was held in the old Episcopal Church, on Warren Street. The best man--a young doctor from Fort Harrison, a fraternity brother of Jonesie--had taken too many cocktails, but their effect was chiefly locomotive. The ceremony itself was simple and brief, almost as short

as the one performed by the justice of the peace for Bart and Jean.

But the rector of St. Peter's brought out the dignity and beauty of it--made Jean realize that the ritual, hallowed by age and custom, stood for the gropings of a race, toward the best which man and woman can share....

Edythe and Jonesie left for their 'post-honeymoon'--and Jean wondered how many such weddings had been followed by 'post' ones--which had lost their significance....

Later, as they drove to Billings, Bart said: "Good wedding. But slightly anachronistic--in the light of our present morality--wouldn't you say?"

"It would have been anachronistic for us, and it was for Edythe and Jonesie," she said thoughtfully. "But it isn't for thousands of couples--young couples who have just fallen in love....Why does it have to cover all kinds of marriages, as the licenses do? Why couldn't it be used to dignify--and glorify--parenthood? Why does it have to be cheapened by being made the prelude to divorce--a second-rate Hollywood pageant?"

"Because people--and Hollywood has helped--have made it that way," he said. "Millions of folks want to patch up the old morality, Jean. But it can't be patched up--because the conditions which developed it and kept it going have changed. And the young couples--innocent 'young love'--have changed too. They see the delayed-marriage-age ahead of them, they know about birth-control--and they just don't wait."

"It makes me--afraid to think of it," she said.

"A decadent morality preluded the fall of Roman civilization. And I imagine the Pillars of the Empire were as blind to it as our own politician-statesmen are to ours."

"Washington isn't exactly moral-conscious," he admitted. "But other people are--and Rome had no facilities to build a new morality, such as we have today. With the radio, the press, the schools, and the hundreds of other agencies for molding public opinion--we could build one. And if we don't--the answer is--marriage a la Russia."

IV

Bart's father and mother 'approved' of Jean. They made her feel at home immediately. Bart's younger brother, 'Bub', would be a senior in Billings High School that fall. He, Jean discovered, was decidedly 'ultra' in his thinking.

"Well, it's all over with you two now," he asserted pontifically the night Jean and Bart arrived. "From now on, you'll jog along with your noses to the matrimonial grindstone. And with those brief words let me express my fraternal felicitations--with the added hope that you may never feel the grindstone!"

"Thanks, Bub. We haven't felt it so far," Bart grinned. "How's your own love-life progressing--or is it?"

"It's--strictly putrid, thank you!" the boy exclaimed. "Gimme the key--I'll put up your car."

When he had gone to do so, Mr. Wilson said: "You two should appreciate that oration. Bub spent a couple of hours on it--to impress you with the fact that you're has-beens, like Mother and me."

"'Noses to the grindstone' is all we've heard from

him for the past year," Mrs. Wilson said. "We did hope he'd change the record when you came, for a few days, anyway."

"Well, he's started on our noses," Bart smiled.

"That will give yours a rest. What's the matter with Bub?"

"Nothing--it's us," Mr. Wilson said. "Mother and I are just moles--or ostriches, with our heads in the sand--or 'reactionaries'. We belong to the 'Old Order'--and it seems there's a 'New Order'. Had you heard about it?"

Bart laughed, Jean smiled. "That's the trouble--Bub's just discovered it," Bart said. "And it's given him mental growing pains. He'll get over 'em, Dad."

"That's what I tell Joe," Mrs. Wilson said. "But sometimes, the way Bub runs around after the girls--and says such awful things about them, too--I just wonder if the boy isn't a little touched in the head."

Bart winked at Jean. "What does he say about 'em?"

Bub came in through the kitchen. "What does who say--about what?" he asked. "I like to keep abreast of the conversation, folks."

"Highly intellectual discussion--right down your alley," Bart told him. "We were considering the vagaries of women."

"I'll tell you what I think of 'em--and gladly!"

Bub exclaimed. "They're a bunch of nit-wits, lame-brains, and gold-diggers! There's not a dame down there at that high school--with any more moral sense than a clam!"

"Then why do you have to run around with them?" his mother asked. "I'd think you'd want to keep away from them."

"Because I'm a sap--a poor fish, that's too dumb to

see he's being made a sucker! From now on, I'm a misanthrope--take it from me!"

"You wouldn't mean 'misogynist'!" his father chuckled.

"Well--whatever it is! And it's a mistake, anyway. The women just aren't worth it."

"Heavens!" Jean exclaimed. "Don't you see what that means, Bub?"

"What?"

"Utter social collapse--and race-suicide! If all the men start hating us women--the race will have to perish!"

"Oh, I didn't mean you and Mom," he said. "But Dad and Mom belong to the Old Order; you and Bart have dumped yourselves into it--and it's dead. And if you ask me--the New Order's going to be a cockeyed mess!"

"What's wrong with it?" Bart asked.

"Well--just look at it!" Bub cried. "What kind of life have I--and my contemporaries--got to look forward to, I ask you? Wage-slavery! With our noses eternally to the grindstone! Bringing our meager pittance--the crumbs from the table of Capitalism--home to wives who won't have children! Who spend what we earn on themselves--who are parasites, grinding us into the very dust under their ruthless heels!"

"That's what's wrong with this world," he went on bitterly. "The women are all gold-diggers...And I guess Hamlet--or somebody---was right about it. It's just--

'....a tale

Told by an idiot, full of sound and fury,
Signifying nothing....'"

Biting his lips, he turned and stalked out of the room. Jean wanted to laugh--wanted to cry.

"Poor kid," Bart said. "What's she done to him now, Mother?"

"They've been fighting all summer," Mrs. Wilson said. "Not it's over a fellow from Livingston. He has a car, and spends more money on her than Bub can afford to spend. I just don't know what to do about him, Bart. He worries me terribly."

Bart said: "Maybe Jean and I can get next to him."

CHAPTER XXI

I

The following afternoon Jean asked Bub to play tennis with her. He agreed, condescendingly--and indifferently. But when she came downstairs in a trim outfit, and bare-legged, his interest picked up a little.

He said: "Gosh, you look--like Bart had robbed the cradle, or something."

"Bart's a little older than I am. But our ages don't seem to matter. We don't even think about them."

"He's a right guy, though--even if he was sap enough to be a school teacher," Bub observed. "I'm glad he had brains enough to marry you."

They drove to the city courts, found an unoccupied one. "All the guys an' dames will be wondering who my new girl is," Bub said as he tightened the net. "Good joke if I let 'em keep it up. Do you mind?"

"Heavens, no!" Jean smiled. "Why don't you introduce

me to some of them as Jean Taylor?"

Bub called to a player on the next court: "Hey, Snoopy! You an' Lil commere an' meet my new flame!"

Jean played up to him. "Oh--but I'm not your flame," she denied archly. "You just flit around, from one to another--like a humming bird!"

"Man o' the world--that's me!" he boasted. "But you'll do--till the next one comes along."

'Snoopy' and 'Lil' were impressed, Jean could see. They stopped their own game, to watch her slam drives back across the net at Bub. She had won her tennis letter at the University, was a better-than-average player; but she was careful to keep the games even. She let him win the first set.

"Say, you're hot stuff!" he grinned. "Think you can beat me the next one--for the drinks?"

"It's a bet," she said. "But you'll have to stake me if I lose. I didn't bring any money."

"Think nothing of it--I'm flush." He waved his hand, called to the others. "Hey, goops! This dame's bet me the drinks she can beat me!"

The 'goops' were joined by others. The set went to deuce several times. Jean finally slammed two drives out of court, and Bub won.

"Well, the woman pays!" He bowed to the gallery. "We'll ankle down to the Senate. See you dopes later."

In the soft drink place he said: "I wish a certain snooty dame had been there. She fancies herself as a queen of the courts--but she's not in your class."

"Who is she, Bub?"

"Harriet Burlingame--not a brain in her head. But she's got every guy in town nuts about her--including yours truly."

"You're rather intellectual, though," Jean said thoughtfully. "I should think you'd want a girl more your type, Bub."

"Show me one--that isn't cross-eyed, bow-legged, horse-faced--or shaped like a sack o' spuds! Brains and looks just don't go together in women." Then he added: "That doesn't apply to you, though."

Coming from Bub, it was supreme flattery. Jean smiled at him. "Thanks, Bub."

"And I just can't figure you as a teacher, either," he said. "A few of the women teachers here are smart enough, I guess. But they--sort of look like the faded, tattered banners of a lost cause--if you get what I mean."

Jean had to smile at the aptness of the figure, despite its pathos.

"I'll bet I know what's wrong with you," she said.

"What?"

"You're just in love with a type--and this Harriet girl happens to look like it. Am I right?"

"Well--there's nothing to her, after you strip off the glamour," he admitted. "But the other dames around here--haven't any glamour."

"How do you know? You've never even seen them!"

Bub meditated that.

"Oh--I've glanced at a few," he said thoughtfully.

"There are a few--who might have potentialities...."

"You know, Bub," she said, "I think you need more

experience--and variety--in women. You can't just hitch your wagon to one star--without looking over the others. If you don't 'look over'--you're likely to 'overlook'."

"Huh! Pretty neat, Jean. Maybe you've got something there."

"I have," she assured him. "And why not start right now? Which ones--or which one--have you been overlooking, Bub?"

"Well, there's Mary Lou Sinclair and Toots Crittenden--and Penny Baker.....Penny has potentialities."

"She'll do to start with, anyway."

That night Bart told Jean the boy had borrowed his car--to take Penny Baker to a dance....

II

Witmer wrote Jean that the Bennington board had agreed for her to teach--stipulating, however, that she live in Bennington. She had meant to do so anyway.

Wedding presents began to accumulate before Jean and Bart left Billings. Bub contributed a carving set--with the observation that its use was a relic of barbarism. Mr. and Mrs. Wilson gave them dishes and other things they would need when they started housekeeping; Sam and Sally sent them an exquisite set of sterling; and Edythe wrote that she and Jonesie were having a 'divine time' and she was 'simply thrilled to death'--but wished they were back in Helena--and she and Jonesie would remember to get Jean and Bart a present--she hoped!

As Jean wrapped the gifts for Bart to pack in the car--including dozens from his friends in Billings, and from the

one she had made in Helena and at the University--she knew that all had come with the good wishes of the senders. The gifts, she thought, were tangible--and practical--sanctions to hers and Bart's homemaking...

In Sleeping Child other gifts awaited them--from Judson and Mary, Chet and Kate, and Dr. Boone. Mary had added a few lines to Judson's letter:

"I am glad you are married, 'Genie. I hope he is a good Christian man. I hope you will make him a good wife. When you have children of your own, you will know what it means to be a mother. Jud and me are getting on as usual. We have much to be thankful for. So have you. The old piano is yours, when you want it.

"Your mother,

"Mary Taylor."

She had sent three linen bedspreads, hand-woven and embroidered by Jean's great-grandmother Taylor; a linen tablecloth and napkins; and a list--evidently prepared years before--marked, "For Eugenie". Under it she had written, "You are to get these when Jud and me are gone."

Jean cried as she read the list. Not because every item in it was familiar to her--but because she could see her mother weighing each item in her mind, considering Jean's and Marion's relative rights to it, and judging the rights with a meticulous fairness.

But Mary's few lines told Jean that her mother had not relented--as Mary would have said, "No--not one iota!" As she had made twin lists when Jean was born, because she believed it was her 'bounden duty' to do so, she had written

the few lines in Judson's letter. They were a concession to blood-relationship--and to duty--nothing more....

Jean sighed as she thought of Mary--and Judson....Had it not been for them, she would have been almost completely happy. The pattern of her own life was determined now, and she liked the pattern....And she could not have lived in Boonville during the past five years. Mary would have made life unlivable for her--and for Judson.

The realization that Mary, now, was the only reason she had for not returning to Boonville came to Jean--almost as a shock. The rest--Sam Baron, what the town thought and said--no longer mattered....And a few weeks of marriage had achieved that for her....Bart had achieved it...

She and Bart would go back the following summer, Jean decided. She tried not to worry about Judson and Mary. Mary had said they were 'as usual'. Judson had bought a car; he wrote of trips with Mary--to Asheville, to Burnsville, to Paint Rock....Maybe, the girl thought, her parents had been drawn closer together....

Jean felt a little guilty, because Dr. Boone's personality was her most vivid memory of Boonville....The doctor had sent her and Bart a huge sterling punch bowl, with accessories. He had written: "Connubial felicitations! I'm glad, 'Genie. He must be a good man--or you wouldn't have picked him. And dang my duodenum--I can still deliver kids with the best of 'em!"

Bart rented her a small, comfortable apartment in Bennington; Jean moved into it the day before her school started. That night they had Lois and Post Office to a

'housewarming' dinner.

Post Office said: "If Uncle Sam had brains enough to see that a married post master is better than a single one--and would pay 'em accordingly--Lois and me could hook up, instead of sitting here, envying you two. I think I'll write the postmaster general about it!"

Bart asked: "Would you get married if Lois could keep on teaching?"

Lois said: "We wouldn't. If I have to work--I don't have to get married."

Post Office grinned. "She doesn't want a man, she wants a meal-ticket!"

Lois retorted: "I've got the man. And I can have plenty of others--on the same terms--if it interests you. Why shouldn't I hold out for a meal-ticket?"

Post Office did not care to argue the point. "Suits me, if it does you, Scatter-Brain," he said. "But we could live on what I'm making, if we didn't have any kids--until I'm making more."

"I'm never going to have kids--I've told you that!" she retorted. "I've had enough of them--teaching them."

"That's O.K. too--but you know how I feel about it," he said indifferently. "No kids, no home--so far as I'm concerned."

Lois slipped off the ring she was wearing and gave it to him. "I may want a meal-ticket--but not with strings on it," she said. "The idea of squalling brats simply leaves me cold!"

He took the ring, looked at it a moment, slipped it

into his pocket. "O. K., Scatter-Brain. And no hard feelings, either."

Lois shrugged. "Why should there be?"

III

A few days later Jean's article, "Mademoiselle from Armentieres", came back, with a printed rejection slip. Bart brought her the rejection slip, said he had sent the article to another magazine.

"You're just wasting postage," Jean said. "Those editors are probably old maids--old hens and sour-pusses--and scared to death of a new idea, anyway."

"Maybe--but they're paid to feel reader-pulses," he reminded her. "And you have to sell your ideas to an editor, to get 'em published."

"I don't care," she said. "I'll not emasculate that article--dress it up in la-de-da Victorian panties--if it never gets published!"

But Bart kept on re-mailing it. It accumulated two more rejection slips. "Well, those were 'big name' publications," he tried to console Jean. "I've a notion to try the 'National' with it. Men and women both read that."

"Peter Glass edits it."

"Know anything about him?"

"His editorials are good," she said. "He used to be a newspaper man--did a feature column that was too frank for moron-consumption."

"Don't be so damned cynical," he chuckled. "We'll try Pete."

Several days later the article came back--with a note:

"Ideas scrambled--reorganize as follows:

- 1) Exposition and glorification of sex--leave as is.
- 2) Evolution and purposes of marriage--clarify 'social' and 'moral' purposes. Readers think they're different.
- 3) Marriage as a social tool in modern society. What are its purposes? Has birth-control changed 'em? How?

"Diagram it, if necessary. Hit the children angle hard. Expand into three sections--and let's see it again."

The note was signed "Glass".

Jean was so excited about it that she telephoned Bart. He came up that night, and they talked over Glass's note.

"His suggestions are obvious ones," she said. "It seems to me, though, that I've already covered them."

"You have--or have implied the answers. But Glass said, 'Diagram it, if necessary'. He means shoot at the average readers--not merely the intellectual ones."

"All right--let's start diagraming it. What, for instance, would you do about soldiers and sailors--and other groups like them?"

"I wouldn't do a damned thing--they'll do it themselves," he assured her. "But the only solutions for them are continence, prostitution, free love, or marriage. Continence is out, of course. And you can't make 'em marry, if they don't want to. Would you make the other two 'moral'?"

"I...just don't know," she admitted. "Are we--ready to be honest about it? Are we civilized enough to leave every thing--except marriage for home-making--to good taste and innate decency?"

"We'll leave most of it to expediency--as with the soldiers and sailors--whether we're civilized or not," he said. "What the hell else can we do about it?"

"Nothing, I suppose....The worst part of it is the hypocrisy, it seems to me. Would it be better to admit that the whole sex-relationship--where it doesn't result in children--is a matter of individual privilege?"

"Many people feel that it is," he said. "Most of 'em keep quiet about it, because they don't want to weaken any further the control-factors of the old code. But--just how important are those factors, aside from parenthood and home-making?"

"All of them spring from pre-birth-control conditions, it seems to me--when most sex-relationships produced children," she said. "The hypocrisy comes from failure even to ask that question--much less, to answer it."

"But the hypocrisy is natural, even for the ones who violate the old code," he said. "It's merely an instinctive clinging to the old mores, in mental self-defense."

"Can't they see the entire bases of the family are changing--in the big population centers, at least? The 'No Children' signs--all those things--mean that the family is conforming to expediency itself, just as it always has done. Polygamy, polyandry, monogamy--with their variations--are examples. And all have been perfectly moral where they were practiced, too."

"People just don't think about those things," he said. "It's easier to call violations of existing morals 'evil'--

and let it go at that. The family, hooked up with religion through the sacrament of marriage--and it's still that to millions of people, Jean--isn't supposed to change. So the millions just assume that 'good' will triumph over 'evil' eventually--and leave it all to God."

Jean remembered what Chuck Ainsworth had said on Bald Mountain--that churches don't question the hand that feeds them--that they are based on tradition, hide their heads in its sands....

"Boonville used to think marriages are 'made in heaven,'" she said. "I wonder if it still does...."

It was almost Christmas before she had finished re-writing the article. Bart mailed the manuscript to the 'National' again, with Glass's note clipped inside, to insure the article's reaching the editor without delay. Jean had expanded it to nearly twenty thousand words--and was sure no magazine would take it, because of its length.

"It's didactic--and preachy--and I emotionalized it too much, anyway," she declared. "He won't take it, Bart--so I'm not even going to think about it."

IV

But she did think about it, he could see, all through the Christmas holidays. For them, he rented a cabin in the hills east of Bennington. He and Jean were snowbound there, for over a week. They had brought supplies to last the period, and there was no need for Bart to go to town anyway. But Jean wished he could have. She was sure the returned manuscript was in the Bennington post office.

A blizzard, then sub-zero weather, followed the first deep snow, however. And an experimental trip with Bart to the spring where they got their water--he had had to shovel the snow away and cut a hole in the ice before they got any--convinced Jean that curiosity must surrender to necessity. It did--reluctantly.

They had brought Christmas presents for each other. After the big snow, Bart and Jean waded through three feet of it to find a tree that suited them. On Christmas Eve they decorated the tree and put the presents under it. The cabin, now almost buried in a snow drift, was warm and homelike; a huge stack of sawed firewood beside the chimney gave assurance that they could keep it that way.

Bart tuned his portable radio to a program of carols, watched Jean light the candles--fuss with the tree--poke the fire in the cook-stove. She rubbed a clear spot on the iced-over window and tried to peer into the blizzard-swept blackness outside.

"Merry Christmas, Mrs. Wilson!" he said. "Why the pensive wistfulness?"

"Oh--Merry Christmas!" She came from the window and kissed him. "I was--just thinking, Bart."

"Shouldn't do it. On Christmas you're supposed to emote only. Big hunks of 'Peace on Earth and Good Will to Men'. How are you on emoting?"

"Are you, by any chance, trying to be cynical?"

"Nope. Merely trying to astound my wife with my subtle humor."

"I'm astounded--but where's the humor?"

"I used to know a joke, " he grinned. "But--maybe I'd better not tell it."

"I'll bet you've forgotten it."

"No, I remember it--but it might shock you."

She yawned. "You're going to tell it anyway--why don't you?"

"Well, we're married--and there's no reason--"

"For Pete's sake--tell it!"

He chuckled. "It's a sort of 'interlocutor' thing," he explained. "You say one thing, and I say another--and that's the joke."

"It must be excruciating."

"Yep, it is. Shall I tell it?"

"Pray do! I'm simply aquiver with anticipation."

"Well--it goes like this," he said. "You sort of sniff, like you smell something--and say, 'Something's burning'. And I--don't say anything till you've done that. Go on--say it!"

Jean sniffed--quite realistically. "Something smells--and I suspect it's your joke, Bart!"

"No--that's all wrong! You don't get the idea, dear. You're supposed to say, 'Something's burning'! Go on--say it!"

Jean sighed. "Well--'Something's burning'! And for heaven's sake--what is it?"

"'Scotland's burning'!" he chortled. "That's the joke--isn't it a dinger?"

Jean stared at him blankly--giggled--sat down on the floor and laughed till tears came into her eyes. "Bart," she cried, "that was the--funniest thing--I ever heard in my life!"

"Isn't it a dinger?" he smirked. "I made it up myself."

"'Dinger' is the only word for it," she admitted. She got up, dried her eyes. "It just makes me--weak to think of it!"

"How about a Tom and Jerry, to stimulate the good old Yuletide spirit of conviviality--and universal benevolence?"

"I'll need several--after that joke. But we'd better wait until after dinner. I'm afraid 'Tom and Jerry' wouldn't wash the dishes."

"They'll facilitate the process, though," he said. He gave her a mug of the drink--refilled it after dinner. Jean, he could see, was no longer 'just thinking'....

Next morning she awoke after he had built the fires.

"Heavens!" she yawned. "What's the matter with me? I feel all right!"

"Expect a hang-over--on two Tom and Jerries?"

Jean slipped out of bed, stretched and yawned again--started pulling on her stockings. "Was I very silly last night, Bart?"

He chuckled. "Nope. To the best of my memory, you lulled me to sleep with 'Mumbo-Jumbo, God of the Congo'."

She giggled. "Was he--in bed with us?"

"The covers were hoodooed--and you wouldn't kick 'em off, of course. So Mumbo must have."

"And how shocked Santa must have been--heavens! It's

Christmas morning--and we haven't opened our packages!"

On New Year's day Bart shoveled the car out of a snow-drift and warmed up the motor--by pouring kettles of hot water on it. Finally he got it started. The road had been wind-swept, as far as the main highway; that had been dragged.

Jean said: "Goodness, I do hope we get to Bennington before the post office closes!"

"It's already closed. This is New Year's day."

"I can get into my box, though."

"And find a stack of Christmas cards--and the 'Ravalli County Express'!"

"Bart--you're positively morbid!"

When they reached the post office, she was so excited that Bart had to work the combination of her lock-box for her. Snatching a bunch of mail from it, she ran to the lighted desk and shuffled through the letters.

"Here it is--a letter!" she cried. "Open it, Bart--I just can't!"

Glass had accepted her article. It was to be run in three installments.

CHAPTER XXII

I

Later, in her apartment, she said: "I'm going to write him to put both our names on it, as co-authors. I wanted to--and I'm going to."

"Nuts," he said. "I'm proud as hell of you, Jean. Neither of us originated the ideas, though. You were the one who used them creatively."

"You helped me clarify them. Without you, I'd still be floundering--'resenting' things. Alone I'm--just half-baked!"

"Nuts to you, sister! Every unmarried woman is half-baked!"

"And every unmarried man is a--Simple Simon!"

When they had settled that, Jean looked at the rest of her mail. She found a letter from Judson. "Professor Starke passed away last week," she read. "He will be missed. He has given much to this town and to Corinth...."

It was hard for her to picture Boonville, or Corinth, without Professor Starke. She agreed with Judson's statement.... Then she changed it to a question: What had Boonville and Corinth given to Professor Starke? She put the question to Bart, who replied with another one.

"Why did he stay there?"

"He gave his life to the place," she said. "He was the most unselfish person I've ever known."

"Didn't Boonville, and Corinth, give him the approval of his own conscience?"

"Yes, but--"

"Well, I never knew the man--but I'd say the place gave him all the self-approval his ego demanded. And that's what mattered most to him."

"But he wasn't egotistical," she said. "Professor Starke considered himself the 'humble servant of God'. And it was not a post with him, either."

"It wouldn't be a pose. He would believe it--fanati-

cally. And he would be 'laying up for himself treasures in Heaven'--wouldn't he?"

"Yes--why shouldn't he?"

"The point is that he had to. And the more 'meek and lowly' he was--the less egotistical about his own achievements--the more credit he was sure God would give him."

"I don't like that a bit," Jean declared. "It means that Professor Starke--merely wanted to be a 'big shot' with the Lord. Actually, he wanted to do God's work, Bart."

"Yes--and he wanted all the pay he could get for it--from the Lord. But what difference does it make to humanity? Whether he took his pay in money--or from the Lord--or from his fellow men?"

"None, I suppose....You mean he'd identified the Lord's approval with his self-approval?"

"Yes, it was so necessary to him that he'd probably have suffered martyrdom to gain it," Bart said. "People call that 'unselfishness'. But it's the highest form of selfishness--the most supreme egotism--known to humanity, it seems to me.

"It made Abraham willing to sacrifice Isaac, to propitiate Jehovah," he reminded her. "It caused that fellow Jephthah actually to sacrifice his daughter. And it's the idea behind all blood-sacrifices--the reasoning which accepted a 'blood-atonement' for a 'lost world'.

"To put it crudely," he chuckled, "Your fanatical 'big-shots' were so 'damned' important that a Son of God just had to die to save 'em!"

"Bart--how can you say a thing like that?"

"To shock you--to make you think," he said. "Did you ever hear of a religious fanatic who was willing to sin--actually to jeopardize his standing with Deity--in order to help 'save' the world?"

"Abou Ben Ahdem--maybe...."

"Maybe is right!" he chuckled. "But Abou was the dream of an unorthodox sinner--who didn't 'love the Lord' anyway. What about the Jewish prophets, and Christ's Apostles?"

Jean smiled. "If it had been a question of 'downright sinning'--the 'Unforgivable Sin'--I'm afraid they'd have shouted: 'Get thee behind me, Satan--to Hell with the world!'"

"And you can't blame them. It was fear--stark terror--of your 'anthropomorphic God', who demanded human sacrifices and martyrdom. It was the blind instinct for spiritual self-preservation. Your religious fanatics were groping toward--but taking no chances, while they did it--an ethical and spiritual monotheism."

"Meaning what?"

"That an ethical God would permit no conflict between the individual-good and the group-good," he said. "A man doesn't have to worry about 'laying up treasures in Heaven'. But your fanatic is afraid, even, to give God credit for being as ethical as he is. Do you see what I mean?"

"Yes," she said, "and your fanatic has a working assumption, at least, that he knows more than God does. Chet Bradley said once that Professor Starke was trying to change human nature--had assumed God had made a mistake about sex...."

"He probably thought the Devil had done it," Bart said.

"But I'm not trying to 'de-bunk' the man. He was human. Undoubtedly, he did the best he knew."

"He did--I'm sure he did," Jean said. "But I wonder if--if sincerity ever justifies ignorance."

"Ignorance is relative--we're all ignorant," he said. "But sincerity--covers a multitude of it."

II

Jean got her check for the article a few days later. It was more than a third of her year's salary as a teacher.

She said: "I spend years studying music, learning to teach it--and I put in a few evenings and week-ends on that article. It just doesn't make sense, Bart."

"They call writing 'creative effort', and figure teaching isn't," he said. "And they'll keep on figuring it, dear--so long as the ghost of Ichabod Crane stalks among us."

"There's my idea for another one!" she exclaimed. "Let me write it down--'The Ghost of Ichabod Crane'!"

She wrote it during the Easter vacation.

The first installment of "Mademoiselle from Armentieres" came out the week after Easter. One afternoon Jean heard a group of her fellow teachers discussing it. None of them knew she had written it.

"Those creatures--swimming around in the slime! They're perfectly nauseous," Miss Fairchild said. "And that boy and girl! She might as well have said they were having--!"

Eileen O'Byrne, the girls' ~~grr~~ teacher, looked at Jim Mason, who taught biology. She whispered to Jean: "What does she imagine they were having--tea?"

Mason said: "The dame who wrote that knows her stuff. I'd let her teach my biology classes, any day."

Jean wanted to kiss him--but refrained.

Eileen said: "I'll bet she's a thousand years old, though--and has a wooden leg. Nobody else would have time to think up an article like that."

"The thing's indecent," Miss Fairchild stated. "It shouldn't be allowed in the mails!"

Vera Buchanan, an English teacher, observed: "It's beautifully written. But I wonder if it was considered advisedly, in the light of present day morals."

Jean had to smile at that--it was so utterly English-teacher-ish. Murmuring an excuse, she left them, wishing she could have heard the rest of the conversation. Anyway, she thought, the article had been interesting enough to make them read it.

Miss Buchanan finally connected the author's name--'Jean Taylor Wilson'--with Jean. There being no reason for her to deny the fact, Jean admitted she had written the article; and within a few days the entire town knew she had done so.

She would have welcomed further reactions to it; but only congratulations came at first--and chiefly on the fact that she had 'made the "National"'. Then Miss Fairchild stopped her in the hall one day.

"I've re-read what you wrote," she said gruffly. "I hate sex--I've always hated myself for being a woman. But if we have to have it, your way of looking at it is as good as any."

Jean thanked her....

She knew the article had made Miss Fairchild think--and painfully. The woman, Jean realized, was another of Bub Wilson's 'tattered banners'....Why shouldn't she hate sex--when every mention of it reminded her of the sterile emptiness of her own womanhood?

But some of the banners around the school were still flying, vigorously, Jean noticed. She began to watch the race--it amounted to that--among the younger women teachers to attract Jim Mason. At first she thought of it as material for a short story, realized it typified thousands of other races--females, trying to attract the fittest male--intelligent womanhood, attempting to achieve its complement of manhood....

Young Mason, however, did not seem aware that he was being chased. Jean wondered if any of the contestants would catch him--matrimonially, or otherwise. The 'otherwise' referred to Eileen O'Byrne.

She was from Butte; she affected a rather defiant sophistication. Bart would have said: "The dame has everything--but brains." But Jean wondered at Mason's seeming indifference to Eileen. It wasn't natural, she realized--brains or no brains. Maybe, she decided, Jim was engaged to another girl.

But he wasn't, she learned. One afternoon he stopped in the music room to discuss her article. He disagreed with some of it, but his interest was intelligent--and flattering. The following week she and Bart had him to dinner. Bart liked him; he inspired Jean to matchmaking. He told Bart:

"No love-life whatever. I'm off the dames."

After he had gone, she said: "Jim's nice, Bart. He needs a wife."

"Huh! Every man does. Any likely contenders?"

"Several would-be ones. I think I'll do a little nominating."

"Fair enough--so long as you let Jim do the electing."

The only likely contenders, however, were Eileen O'Byrne and Vera Buchanan. Both were given to affectations. Eileen's were obvious--and contradictory; she didn't look the part she played. Vera's were those of 'refinement'. She was good looking, dressed beautifully; but she worked too hard at being 'nice', Jean thought--and she wondered if things had been 'considered advisedly'.

At first Jean chose the Irish girl as the villainess of the piece. She was predatory; Vera merely invited pursuit--in the most 'lady-like' manner. But that, Jean came to see, actually hid the subtlety of desperation. Vera realized she might become a 'tattered banner'. Jean began to feel guilty, as she watched the girl look at Mason--as though she were peering behind the curtain of a human soul....

And Eileen did not qualify as a villainess. One afternoon Jean heard another teacher say: "Eileen's from Dublin Gulch--what else could you expect of her?"

Jean knew nothing of the Gulch--but Eileen had managed to get through a good university....Why shouldn't she want to rise still further above Dublin Gulch--whatever it meant--by marrying Jim Mason?

Then Jean learned that Jim also was from Butte--that his father was superintendent of the mine in which Eileen's had worked for years as a foreman. Jim said he had known the girl since they were children, that they had gone to Butte High School together. And Jean learned another item, one she couldn't account for: his parents, and Eileen's, were Catholics--but neither Jim nor Eileen was a Catholic....

Nor could it be a coincidence, Jean thought, that both were teaching at Bennington, their first year out of college. Bart was able to throw a little light on that. The Butte superintendent had offered Eileen a place in the Butte schools; she had refused it....

Jean forgot to think of them as possible characters in a story--realized she was too ignorant to attempt the role of deus ex machina....Eileen needed marriage. Without it, she would become another Lois....Vera, if she did not marry, would become a 'tattered banner'...

And Jim--might be a snob. But he didn't seem to be...

III

Then, when Jean's sympathies had been divided almost equally between the two girls, Mason began to go out with Vera. Jean was responsible for that.

She had said: "Why don't you bring one of the girls over Saturday evening, Jim? We could play bridge."

"It's an idea. Who, for instance?"

"Eileen--or Vera. Anybody you want, Jim."

Mason had hesitated. "Eileen...wouldn't come with me."

Jean had stared at him. "Of course she would!"

"No, she wouldn't....We used to be pretty thick, Jean. But it--didn't work out."

He had brought Vera. And afterwards he started taking her to dances and school functions. But Jean thought he was doing so as a defense against Eileen. When he could, he avoided her; when he couldn't, his manner showed he was afraid of her.

But Vera, it seemed, was not aware of the situation. Even Bart noticed the change in her. "The dame has something--when she lets her hair down and acts like a human being. I think Jim could go further--and do worse."

Jean said: "Half the time he doesn't know she's around. He's crazy about Eileen--and I'm afraid he's a snob, Bart."

"Nuts. I'll make you a bet there's more between those two than Dublin Gulch. Mason's no snob."

Lois and Post Office had Jean and Bart to dinner at a restaurant a few nights later. Bart had told her their quarrel had effected no change in their relationship, and Lois intimated that it hadn't, at dinner. Jean decided it was one of expediency, for both....She wondered if Jim Mason and Eileen O'Byrne had had a similar relationship, which hadn't 'worked out'--whether Eileen was willing to continue it, for the sake of expediency, and Jim was not....

From her arrival in Bennington Eileen had had plenty of beaux, but she had showed no preference for any one of them. Now, however, she started going out with Garry Anderson, the young cashier of Bennington's bank. Admittedly, Garry was the masculine catch of the town; but Jean was sure Eileen

was using him merely as a foil to Vera Buchanan. Obviously, the Irish girl was not pining away, however.

At dances, especially, Jim's avoidance of her was beginning to cause comment. One night Eileen called to him--he and Vera were with Jean and Bart: "O Mr. Mason! I've been looking forward to a minuet with you--so much!"

Jim flushed--went over to her and Garry. "Would you--dance with me?"

"I still dance--if you haven't noticed it. And quite well. Don't you agree, Mr. Anderson?"

Garry bowed. "Most heartily, Miss O'Byrne. You're the best little hooper--that ever came from Dublin Gulsh!"

Eileen flashed him a smile. "'Tis the Blarney Stone itself you've been kissin'," she said. "But Jean ~~lets~~ Bart dance with me, Jim. You needn't be afraid to."

"I'm not afraid to," he said gruffly. "I didn't think you wanted me to."

Eileen laughed--a ripple of pure merriment. "Isn't he quaint, Garry? I'm practically begging him to!"

Jim said: "O. K., Eileen--let's dance."

He had forgotten he had the dance with Vera. As she watched them whirl across the floor--she was no longer beautiful....

Garry was socially inclined. Later he said: "By the way, Eileen, why don't you invite us all over to Butte some week-end--to a good old Irish wake, or something?"

She said: "I'd love to...But we Irish--don't die to order, Garry."

Then she flushed--glanced at Jim. The blood had drained

from his face.

He muttered: "Terry did....."

Eileen bit her lips. She said quietly: "Yes, Jim-- Terry made a good end--and he had a good wake. God rest his soul!"

Jim tried to speak--turned and left the dance floor....

IV

After they had taken Vera home, Bart and Jean found Jim waiting for them at her apartment. Bart gave him a drink of brandy--one of their wedding presents. Jean went into her kitchenette to make coffee.

"I've got to talk--to somebody," Mason said. "I guess you and Jean think I'm nuts."

Jim said: "Sit down, Jim. You're with friends--and it'll do you good to talk."

Mason sat down, lighted a cigarette. He smoked a few puffs, crushed the cigarette in an ash-tray. Jean came in and sat down. "We took Vera home, Jim," she said.

"Thanks. I'd--forgotten her."

He lighted another cigarette....

"Terry O'Byrne was Eileen's twin brother--my best friend," he said. "Terry was a little guy....We played basketball together in High School. He didn't go to college; but we worked summers together--in the Big Macaw mine, in Butte. My dad is superintendent of it."

He crushed out the cigarette. "My dad was shanty Irish-- not that it makes any difference," he went on. "But Dad has always been sensitive about it....The O'Byrnes weren't."

Eileen's father got run out of Ireland, for mixing in the Fenian trouble. You know the type--devil-may-care--never had done a lick of work in his life. He drifted around--came to Butte dead-broke--started to work as a mucker.

"He had a wife to support, by that time. She's Irish too--the kind that can laugh about being broke....

"Dad always hated O'Byrne. Paddy's just a mine foreman, doesn't care to be anything else. But...I've seen him come out of the Big Macaw a thousand times, I guess--unshaven, dripping muck and sweat--drill-dust smeared all over his face--and looking as though he owned the world....Terry was like that too....

"Anyway--Dad hated the man. It burned him up for me to run around with Terry--and Eileen....'They're nobodies!' he'd shout. "And Paddy--damn him!--acts like his brats are doin' you a favor to be seen with you!"

"Paddy didn't, though. The O'Byrnes....Well, they've never had to tell themselves they're as good as anybody. They know they are. You've noticed that in Eileen I guess, Jean....Her dad was Irish gentry.

"And the funny part of it was that my dad tried like hell to make me as good as they were....He sent me to college just to spite Paddy--when Terry wouldn't go...But Eileen went... She and I got engaged when we were in high school. We had it all worked out--finish college, work a year, and then get married...."

Jean murmured: "Why didn't you, Jim?"

"It happened last summer," he said presently. "We--

Terry and I--were working in the Big Macaw....He was bossing a crew in another drift. I was running a jack-hammer, with another gang. Paddy was on the stope below me.

"A cave-in trapped me--broke a leg and put me out cold. A couple of stolls sort of scissored over me, though. That kept me from being crushed. But a hundred tons of rock were right over me--ready to fall....

"Dad went nuts when they told him I was trapped, I guess. I came to for a few minutes--heard him yelling and cursing, out there....Paddy was telling him to take it easy. 'Easy--hell!' Dad shouted. 'It'll be down on 'im! I'll drag 'im out!'

"Paddy said: 'You're too big--you'd start the dam' slide! Let Terry do it, Dan!'

"Dad yelled: 'Dam' you to hell! No O'Byrne has to save my boy! Git out of my way!'

"Paddy hit him--knocked him cold....I fainted again. When I came to, I was in the hospital.....Terry had jacked up the stolls, had got a rope around me. He lifted the rock that held my leg, and the others pulled me out.....But the slide--got Terry...."

Jean and Bart could think of nothing to say. What could they say? Jean finally murmured: "But--nobody could blame you, Jim...."

"Maybe not.....Terry was Eileen's twin brother....She--didn't come to see me. When I got out of the hospital, she'd left Butte."

Jean asked: "Didn't you see her at all--until you came to Bennington?"

"No. But I did talk to Paddy and Mrs. O'Byrne. They--tried to make it easy for me...But Eileen had gone..."

"Haven't you said anything to her yet--since you came to Bennington?"

"My God, Jean! How could I--when every sight of me reminds her of Terry...."

But Eileen had come to Bennington. And she had been crying when she left the dance that night....

Jean went to the telephone. "Jim Mason's over here," she told Eileen. "He wants to talk to you."

"Tell him--I'm coming over there!"

CHAPTER XXIII

I

A few weeks later Jim and Eileen were married in Butte, by a Catholic priest. "We were brought up good Catholics," the girl told Jean. "But in high school we got smart--or 'modern' or something--and decided we could do our own religious thinking. But we didn't do any--and we'd quit going to church."

Jim said: "That hurt our folks. Mine blamed Eileen for it, and hers blamed me. But now that we're married--by a priest--Dad's got it through his thick Mick head that he and Paddy actually have nothing to fight about."

Jean and Bart were glad the other two had settled it that way. She said: "They can accept the Catholic pattern--a lot easier than they could reject it. It fills a need for them."

"Institutions have to do that," he said. "When they

stop doing it--evolution takes care of 'em."

The Bennington school board made considerable to-do about Eileen's getting married, however. Some of them blamed Jean--for having set a precedent. And when the second installment of her article came out, those who read it--almost everybody in Bennington did--realized it referred to such couples as Eileen and Jim, Bart and herself.

The town agreed with St. Paul--that it was 'better to marry than to burn'. The question was whether the board should rehire Jean and Eileen for the coming year. Both were popular as teachers. And in the light of Jean's article married women-teachers assumed a new significance, to many of its readers. The matter was argued, hot and furiously, by the entire town.

Finally a mass-meeting of the voters was called, to meet in the high school auditorium. Everybody who could get there attended, of course. Bart came up from Sleeping Child. There were a few mild talks, at first; then somebody made a motion that Jim's salary be increased, in order that he might support Eileen without her having to teach.

Before it could be seconded, however, one of the married men on the high school faculty--there were four--sprang up and demanded that the motion be amended, to include higher salaries for all married men in the system, with a bonus for each child!

That started fireworks, of course. Finally, after a parliamentary unscrambling of them, the motion and the amendment were voted down. Teachers, it appeared, were not supposed to have children.

Then Garry Anderson moved to repeal the married woman ruling. It was the topic the local orators had come primed to discuss. It called forth several impassioned speeches--last of which never got around to the question. The chairman of the school board, a lawyer named McMonnies, who was also a perennially unsuccessful candidate for county attorney, got up and delivered his prepared piece de resistance of the evening.

"As chairman of the school board of this municipality, as a citizen of this community," he bellowed, in the tones of an oratorical aurochs, "I have a question to propound--a statement to make! What right has Mrs. Wilson, I ask you--and with all due respect to her as a charming and talented young woman--to dictate the morals of Bennington? Or--of this Nation?

"I, for one, resent her insinuation that the young men and women of America--of this state, of this town--needed to be herded into matrimony--like a herd of cattle! It is a reflection upon the moral integrity--upon the purity, the virtue, the nobility--of our young manhood and womanhood!

"Yes, my friends, it is a smear--a blot, a stain--upon the pure, white page of virtue itself! It is a desecration of the sacred--the holy, the God-sanctioned--bond of matrimony! It is a blot upon the fair escutcheon--upon the untarnished banner--!"

"Shut up, Mac! We've all heard about the 'untarnished banner'!" Garry Anderson shouted. "Make him sit down, Withers--he's out of order!"

McMonnies had insisted that the superintendent preside over the meeting, in order that he might speak from the floor. A chorus of hoots and hisses seconded Garry's demand. But the lawyer was not to be robbed of his climax.

"I'll not sit down--nobody can make me!" he thundered.

Witmer's gavel--and a pandemonium of hoots, cat-calls, and shouts of 'throw him out!'--kept him from being heard, however. Bart squeezed Jean's hand. "Sit tight, dear--this is one for the books!"

Finally Witmer pounded the meeting to order. "Unless you mean to discuss the question, Mr. McMonnies," he said quietly, "please sit down."

The lawyer had forgotten the question--but not the threats of physical violence. He sat down, mopped his face with his handkerchief.

Witmer said: "If I may speak for the majority here, I wish to apologize to Mrs. Wilson for the ill-considered remarks of Mr. McMonnies."

Obviously, he did speak for the majority. Garry Anderson shouted: "Mr. Chairman!" Witmer recognized him.

"It's a waste of breath to apologize for Mac," he said. "The only thing we need to explain to Jean, folks, is our own stupidity--in electing Mac for anything higher than dog-catcher!"

Witmer called them back to the order of business, and they voted, almost unanimously, to repeal the married-women ruling. Then McMonnies arose.

He said: "I may be dumb--maybe I just can't read

English--and wouldn't even make a good dog-catcher! But-- I've got brains enough to know when I'm licked!

"I here and now--and with all the humility of confessed and acknowledged ignorance--tender to Mrs. Wilson my humble, contrite, and sincere apologies!"

He stopped, took off his spectacles, went on: "And I supplicate--I entreat--I beg!--that I may become enlightened! That the bright rays of understanding may permeate the dark recesses of my mind! That the humiliating veil of ignorance may be lifted from my abortive--from my benighted!--intelligence."

Garry Anderson said: "Mr. Chairman--and folks: Mac means well. If I may interpret, he wants Jean to tell him--in words of one syllable--just what she was getting at in those articles. And the rest of us--want to hear her do it!"

She did so--without personalities--and as nearly as possible, in words of one syllable....

II

Later, in Jean's apartment, she said: "Mr. McMonnies wants to sit at my feet, Bart. What do you suppose he asked ~~me~~?"

Bart smiled. "Mac's forte is noise. He's likely to say anything--almost certain to mean nothing."

"He asked me to start a discussion group. He said he'd understood my talk--but not what I'd written. And a lot of people are ear-learners, you know."

"Yes, but Mac isn't--any kind of learner. He already knows everything. You aren't taking him seriously, by any chance?"

"Well--I have my operetta," she said thoughtfully. "But I might shift that, for one night a week."

"You'll be sticking your neck out," he declared. "Lord, Jean, you can't hope to regenerate a life-long wind-bag like Mac--even if you teach him to read. People like him read only to confirm their fixed opinions, anyway. And Mac has just one that matters to him--that he's a 'big shot'."

"Thanks for making up my mind. I'm going to 'stick my neck out', dear!"

"Call it 'heaping coals of fire'--and get 'em dumped right back on your own head! That guy's wanting to sit at your feet--means he'll try to knock 'em out from under you."

"Your figures are mixed, Bart--and I suspect your judgment is."

"Well--how about yours? After that talk you made to-night, for you to start trying to regenerate wind-bags is like--George Eliot turning Don Quixote!"

"So I'm just a little Pollyanna--heaping coals of fire!" she said sweetly. "Anyway--to keep your mixed figure--you won't have to play Sancho, dear."

Bart recognized the usual storm signals. He grinned. "Don't get peeved about it, dear."

"But--I am peeved!" she declared. "For a cent I wouldn't even speak to you--till I can think of something mean to say!"

He chuckled at that. "Shall I suggest a few?"

"Bart Wilson, you're so smugly sure--of everything and everybody--you just make me sick! Right now you're grinning

like a chessy-cat--telling yourself I'm just being temperamental!"

"Aren't you being temperamental?"

"No, I'm not! And I think you're--!"

"A jackass. And you'd like to wring my neck."

"Wrong!" she exclaimed. "For once--you're wrong, my dear! I was thinking 'donkey'!"

The following Wednesday night--it was the night before the first meeting of her discussion group--Bart came into the high school auditorium during Jean's operetta practice. He had planned to come the following night. Jean went on with her practice--wondered vaguely if something had happened to change his plans.

When the rehearsal was over, he helped her turn off the lights. She asked: "Is there anything wrong, Bart?"

He said: "Let the kids get away, Jean. I'll tell you about it then."

The youngsters had started an impromptu rehearsal on the steps. Jean said: "They'll go home in a few minutes. I don't like to spoil their fun, Bart. Let's get into the car."

When they had done so, he said: "Post Office killed Lois tonight--and himself."

"How utterly horrible!"

"I heard the shots--I was in my room next door," he said. "We had to break into Lois's room. When we did--they were both dead."

"It must have been....ghastly."

"It wasn't--pretty....Post Office had taken an automatic, the one he kept in his office. There was nothing like a fight, though. He--just shot her and shot himself."

"How could he--do a thing like that?"

"Her giving him back his ring hadn't meant anything, apparently....Post Office took her to a dance at Woodside last Saturday night. And they're saying in Sleeping Child she started playing up to a young highway engineer."

"Post Office...knew she was out for another meal-ticket," Jean said. "And he must have been brooding over her threat to do that."

"Yes, it looks like it."

"Was there anything we could have done--that we didn't do? I just--feel awful about it, Bart..."

"People always ask that question--afterwards," he said. "But you can't go butting into people's lives, Jean. Not unless the people want you to...The only thing anybody--that means society--can do is to give folks like Post Office and Lois a sane pattern of living."

"We read about things like that, almost every day," she murmured. "And a ll of 'em are proofs--ghastly, horrible proofs, Bart--that morals and marriage should be divorced from meal-tickets...."

Next day, when Bennington learned the bodies were at the local undertaker's, dozens of people went to see them. Many drove up from Sleeping Child and from the other valley towns. There was a brief inquest, which Bart had to attend. It's verdict was obvious.

Jean had not looked at the bodies--the pathetic physical shells of what had been Lois and Post Office... She wondered about the other part of them--the minds....All that had differentiated Lois and Post Office from animal flesh and bone....The part which man has named a soul....

III

Jean had expected a scant attendance at the first meeting of her discussion club, but over a dozen came. Jean was pleased to see Garry Anderson and Vera Buchanan among them--she had had Garry and Vera to her apartment, ostensibly, for bridge.

"I'm going to start the discussion with a question," Jean said: "Who is responsible for the tragedy at Sleeping Child last night?"

Wilkinson, the Presbyterian minister, had an answer--godlessness. He said: "Any man with the love of God in his heart would never lift the brutal hand of murder against one of his fellow creatures--much less, against the woman he wanted to marry! We are all responsible, my friends. We have fostered godlessness. We have permitted it to sink its serpent-fangs into the very life-stream of our religion! It has poisoned our thinking--it has brutalized us--has weakened our respect for the laws of mankind--and of God Almighty Himself!"

The old pattern, Jean thought--half-truths, embalmed in the meaningless mysticism of religious dogma.

Garry Anderson said: "I disagree with you, Mr. Wilkinson. No law of God or man could have stopped that fellow

from killing her. The fear of Hell-fire might have done it, though. And that puts the blame on you, Mr. Wilkinson--and on other preachers like you. It means you've fallen down on your jobs--of keeping people afraid to commit murder. Or it means you've failed in your teaching the love of God, as preached by Jesus Christ."

Wilkinson bristled. "How have we failed, Mr. Anderson?"

"For almost two thousand years you've been specialists--or you've claimed to be," Garry said. "And you haven't--cured the patient yet! But you're afraid to blame God--not honest enough to blame yourselves--so you blame the patient! I, for one, am getting rather tired of hearing you do it."

Vera Buchanan said: "Let me answer that, Mr. Wilkinson."

The preacher had risen; he bowed to Vera and sat down.

She said quietly: "If I may use Garry's figure--it might be well for us to remember that a 'patient' must want to recover, before a doctor--or even a 'specialist'--can cure him."

Garry said: "That's right, Vera. But a good doctor would have known that--and would have done something about it--a thousand years ago, it seems to me. But preachers haven't even--developed a good 'bedside manner'. They keep telling the 'patient' how sick he is! They talk about his 'soul'--without realizing, apparently, that he has a mind to go with it."

"I'll admit that too," Vera smiled. "But the clergy are--we, ourselves. We pick one of ourselves, or sanction one's becoming a preacher. We license him as a preacher. Then we turn our entire relationship to God--the whole question of

religion--over to him. Is he to blame, Garry--if he can't settle it for us?"

"Maybe not," Garry admitted. "I guess we're all to blame, at that. And I hope you realize, Mr. Wilkinson," he told the preacher, "that I meant nothing personal, anyway."

"We of the cloth are used to criticism," Wilkinson said stiffly. "When we can profit by it, we should welcome it."

McMonnies got up, removed his spectacles, began polishing them with his handkerchief.

"Well--that's that," he rumbled. "We admit we're all to blame. So--what are we to blame for? I'm a religious man by nature--I believe in God--I've confessed Jesus Christ. But right now, my friends--and I say it with all due reverence--I think we'd better leave God, Jesus Christ, and religion out of it.

"If He'd wanted to, God could have kept that post master from shooting that teacher. And the fact that God didn't--puts the whole thing up to us....It means we fell down on our jobs, somewhere....

"But--where? I must confess I don't know. It's simply too deep--too complicated, my friends,--for my humble and limited intelligence."

Witmer said: "I can't see that, Mac. We can't dictate the morals--or the behavior--of adult men and women. It's no use to try, for their behavior-patterns were formed when they were children. As I see it, we might as well charge off what happened last night--as an unavoidable casualty of civilization. We read about such things in the newspapers. But lightning has struck at our own doorstep, and we're

trying to find a bed to crawl under--when there isn't any bed."

McMonnies said: "What was that big word you used, Witmer?"

The superintendent smiled. "I try not to use big words, Mac. Frequently they're merely a rattling of the tools of thinking."

"Well, that's one I want to rattle," McMonnies said.

"It had something to do with 'behavior'."

"'Behavior-patterns'?"

"Yes--that's it."

The lawyer got up again, went through his usual routine with his glasses. "We make traffic laws, to keep people from killing themselves," he said. "But people go right on doing it. And we've learned that the only way to keep 'em from doing it is to get 'em into the habit of safe driving. That, I believe, is one of your 'behavior-patterns', Witmer."

The superintendent nodded.

"Well--people are just as dead, if they die from wrong thinking," the lawyer said. "And more people are maimed for life by it than by automobiles. Why, Witmer, aren't we just as responsible--and just as culpable, when we neglect 'em--for 'behavior-patterns' that deal with 'safe living'?"

"We are, undoubtedly," Witmer said. "And you misunderstood me, Mac.--I said 'adults'. We have to establish behavior-patterns in children and adolescents--because it's pretty hard, when all's said and done, to teach old dogs new tricks. The patterns are started in the home; the community environment steps in--and the schools. But until we've all learned to do a better job of it--we must expect those 'casualties of civilization'."

Bart glanced at Jean. "Here's a brass tack we can get down to," he said. "Post Office wanted to marry Lois; he wanted a home and children. Both are good patterns, folks. But civilization had taught her another one, not so good--to bargain with sex and marriage for a standard of living. Lois was honest about it. She admitted she meant to marry a 'meal-ticket'."

The discussion group stayed on that tack for the next three meetings. Mr. Wilkinson preached a sermon about it--and McMonnies started quoting from Jean's article, to prove that teachers are custodians of the 'Wealth of Nations'....

IV

"I was wrong about Mac," Bart admitted to Jean. "He's doing more with those big words than--Witmer's 'rattling the tools of thinking'."

Jean smiled, ruffled his hair.

"He represents what the colleges and universities used to turn out as 'educated'," she said. "Leaners on authority--and that's a pattern too."

"But what hits me hardest about your group is that it's a refutation of all that slush about the 'mediocrity of small-town minds!'"

"Bart," she said, "Whitman wrote 'I Hear America Singing'. What if we could write, truthfully, 'I Hear America Thinking'!"

"It's coming--slowly....You can hear its rumblings--in the distance--right now...."

"What if--it could become a roar!" she exclaimed. "There's enough mind-power in every little community--in every town and city--to make each one a Utopia! And in the aggregate there's

more than enough to regenerate--to re-motivate--the world! When are we going to learn how to harness it--to direct it and use it?

"And who's going to do it?" she asked. "Can it ever be done? Is world-fellowship only a dream--a vision--a mental mirage? Can we dream a dream, even--or see a vision or mirage--which has no basis of reality?"

"The dreams and visions get into our subconsciousness from reality," he said. "And every mirage is a reflection of reality....The time will come when we'll choose our leaders for their abilities--other than vocal. And we're learning to do that--slowly. It's one of the rumblings."

"And another is--what Garry Anderson said to that preacher the other night! I could have added quite a few things he left out."

Bart chuckled. "If it will make you feel any better, you can say 'em to me, dear. Why not start with the preachers' ancestry--like a fish-wife?"

Jean made a face at him. "I'll--do just that! Your preacher of today is a direct lineal descendant of the witch-doctor, the tribal medicine man. He claims to mediate between God and us, just as his ancient prototype claimed to mediate between his gods--mostly evil spirits--and his tribesmen. And your 'mediator' has capitalized, since the days of animism, on the fears, superstitions, and ignorance of the masses--has feathered his own nest by selling them mental security!"

Bart grinned. "Go on, dear--I'm listening."

"Dressed in snake skins, stuffed lizzards, and what-not,"

she said, "wearing a horrible mask, shaking a rattle--burning incense, mumbling incantations--genuflecting, making mystic signs, using all the 'hoc est corpus' of his stock-in-trade--the medicine man went into his tabooed sanctuary and 'communed' with his deities. He 'propitiated' them--and invariably demanded 'a fee for the same'--just as your preacher still does!

Bart chuckled. "Go on--no argument, so far."

"Well--the ancient Israelitish priests were the sons of the medicine men," she said. "And that makes the Christian clergy their grandsons--with a few 'pagan' relatives thrown in! And the Christian clergy took over the mental fire-insurance business from the Jews--in toto. They didn't even have to sell the policies--the fire had been started by Adam and Eve!"

"Nice graft--if you ask me."

"It was--just that!" she exclaimed. "And down through the centuries--nineteen of 'em!--the one 'Unforgivable Sin' for a Christian has been thinking! Who ever heard of a man's being 'lost'--or excommunicated--for mere ignorance! 'Thou shalt not touch the ark of the Lord thy God--even when it totters'! That has protected the preachers' graft--with a ruthlessness which makes pikers of modern gangsters!"

"And they had the unmitigated nerve to call us 'sinners'!"

"They still have it! They still peddle their wares at the same old stand--using the same tricks of cryptic words, symbols, contortions--signs, chants, and invocations. Their security has depended on making religion the 'mental anaesthesia' of the masses; hence, they have tabooed thought on the subject,

for everybody except themselves. And they haven't needed to think--they've been 'inspired'!"

He laughed. "I'll bet preachers invented the 'closed shop', Jean!"

"They did! Their 'inspiration' took the Adam-and-Eve myth from the Jews--because they needed it in their 'business'--and for a century after modern science has made it ridiculous, they've tried to shove it down our throats!"

"Yes, quite a few of 'em have, anyway."

"But science has made God reasonable, Bart....It has revealed His Plan. And their 'divine revelation' still tries--~~for~~ their own ends--to keep Him a myth."

Bart smiled again. "You haven't overlooked anything--by any chance, dear?"

Jean smiled herself. "Yes, they still wear masks--sanctimonious ones!"

"Hell's bells--it looks as though we 'mere sinners' have been pretty dumb!" he said. "Why didn't we pass a law against the preachers? Or try to 'save' em', or something?"

"We should have--passed the law. We couldn't 'save' the preachers, because they didn't want to be 'saved'!"

"True enough, but-- Has it occurred to you that primitive man needed his witch-doctors? Or that Christian civilization has needed--and still needs--its preachers? Heck, gal--we still need astrologers, fortune tellers--and radio commentators! If we didn't--they wouldn't exist today."

"And--I suppose we still need crooked politicians and gangsters!"

"No, we just need to remove the ignorance which makes both inevitable. And by the same token we need to remove the kind that makes ignorant and unscrupulous preachers--and teachers and doctors and all the rest of 'em--inevitable."

"Do we need to be exploited by the preachers?"

"Hell, no! We need the mental security they give us, though. All we can take of it, and in any form we can accept. And preachers aren't gangsters--exactly--dear! Vera Buchanan was right when she said they are ourselves. They've always been--just some of 'em a little smarter than the rank-and-file. Wilkinson is part of his congregation--one of 'em. They need him--or they wouldn't pay his salary."

She said: "Go on--I'm still listening."

"Your witch-doctor," he told her, "was merely the first of his tribe to work out acceptable answers to the why's of human existence--acceptable to himself, as well as to his tribe. By condemning him, you assume he knew more than he had any right to know. And by condemning fellows like Wilkinson, by questioning their sincerity of belief, you assume a knowledge of their backgrounds--environmental and educational--which you do not possess, Jean.

"What you're actually doing is to assume that his mental processes are similar to your own--when there's not one chance in a million that they could be. And don't forget, by the way, that Christianity is still pretty acceptable to a lot of folks. It's just possible, too, that even a few preachers might believe in it!"

"Of course they believe in it! Why wouldn't they--when it's their meal-ticket?"

CHAPTER XXIV

I

Bart did not answer immediately. He wondered if Jean was ready to give up her prejudice against religion and preachers--to consider them impersonally, the one as a basic social institution; the others as human agents, more or less skilled, trying to make religion function in society....

"Life has been relatively easy for preachers, as a class--owing to their 'fire-insurance business'," he said after a few moments. "They've never had to justify themselves--or their 'policies'--to society, until recently. And, as you say, 'divine inspiration' has made it unnecessary for them to think.

"But they have thought, nevertheless, Jean. They've developed and upheld the concept of God, as an ethical, moral, and spiritual deity. And by doing that they've combated the idea of blind determinism--which takes man back to the jungle."

"Yes, they've come a long way from the witch-doctors," she admitted. "But--so has civilization, Bart. And the preacher keeps on practicing as a 'sin-doctor'--and peddling his 'fire-insurance'. That's the part I object to most. No 'ethical, moral, and spiritual' deity could sanction it."

"But its symbolism has helped to develop and maintain Christianity," he said. "It has enabled Christianity to function down through the years as an agent of social control. The 'fire-insurance' has been no laughing matter--'Hell' has been the penalty for 'sin'. And right now we need a 'hell'--or something like it--to penalize the sins of ignorance.

"And we still need religion," he declared. "Reasonable religion, which intelligent people can accept without being

moral hypocrites. We need it to vitalize our sense of social responsibility, to give purpose and meaning to our existence."

"Do you mean 'revealed religion'?"

"What about 'revealed astronomy'--or medicine, geology, geography, chemistry, physics, or biology?" he countered.

"Has God ever 'revealed' anything to man--even His Only Begotten Son--which man did not have to achieve for himself? Is it reasonable to assume God would violate one of His own laws--mental evolution?"

"It isn't--and dogmatic Christianity is as dead as the dodo!" she exclaimed. "Several million people, for the sake of mental security, are just propping up the corpse--and worshipping it."

Bart smiled. "I wouldn't say that. With fifty-five million still church members here in the United States, and the other seventy-odd merely passively indifferent, it seems the 'corpse' has a little animation in it. And the true basis of Christianity, without dogma, is as eternal as life itself."

"What do you mean by its 'true basis'?"

"Christ's teachings--co-operation, the fellowship of mankind," he said. "Leaving the dogma part to the theologians--who postulated it, but have never been able to explain it--let's consider Christ as a human being. Because we're limited by human experience, it's the only basis we can consider him on, anyway. Mankind has always personified the gods, Jean."

"I know it has," she murmured. "What about Christ--as a human being?"

Bart looked at her for a few moments. He said: "Christ

was a great creative genius, in the field of human relationships. He was the first to remind the world that man is no longer a beast; that he has a fragment of divinity within him--a 'soul' or 'mind'--which can free him from the need of fear, hate, jealousy; that it can free him only if he learns to substitute as thought-materials the concepts of co-operation, human brotherhood, and faith--in humanity itself."

"Then....Christianity doesn't make us all grasshoppers."

"It makes us self-determinant, Jean. We have learned that the 'will of the Father' is manifested in natural laws--which we can discover and obey. If we fail to obey them, individually or as a group--if we 'sin'--the penalty is failure to survive."

"Christ didn't say that, though..."

"No, He said, 'God is love'--in the language of His age. Christ's was the greatest contribution to man's thought-materials in the history of the world, it seems to me. And Christianity answered an existing need in men's minds. If it hadn't done that, the church would have vanished long ago--into the limbo of trial-and-error thought. Racially, however, we have not yet achieved Christ."

"What do you mean?"

"Man evolved," he reminded her. "His ancestors developed him a body, a brain, instincts to use in it--until he had learned to remember his experiences and reason from them. In other words, until man had developed 'non-material culture'. All of life, since its beginning, has survived not through the meddling of Deity, but because it conformed to the laws of

meddling of Deity, but because it conformed to the laws of survival. God does not break His laws Himself, nor does He let His creatures break them. In other words, man cannot live by Christ's teachings until he achieves them himself--believes 'em to the point where he's willing to live by 'em."

"I see...." she murmured. "Professing Christianity, we still live by the hates, fears, and greeds of primitive man... We have to live that way--in self-defense--until enough of us have lost the vestigial mental appendixes which helped primitive man survive....It seems to me, though, that we need a few mental appendectomies, Bart."

"No, the only treatment is natural evolution," he said. "But we can hasten its action consciously, now....The race, though, must continue to crawl upward slowly--most of it blindly--until the masses are capable of seeing that all we have accomplished above the beast-level has been through co-operation....The only lasting security, whether individual or national--or world-wide--can be achieved only through the conscious and concerted 'mobilization' of group attitudes and concepts."

"Where do the preachers come into that?"

"They have a powerful body of organizations behind them. And they have Christ's teachings--human brotherhood. In fact, they have everything real they've ever had, it seems to me. But their fight is with 'ignorance', not 'sin'. If they don't shed their mantles of dogma and become realists, evolution will take care of 'em--as 'sin-doctors'--just as it took care of the witch-doctors."

"That's the real question, I suppose," she said. "Will they cling to their mantles of dogma--and let the recession of evolution sound for Christianity? Will they allow it to slip back into the category of half-forgotten religions, which were stepping stones to itself--and let a new agency take over its materials?"

"Maybe they will, Jean. I just don't know--whether they can 'adapt' or not."

"Christ blazed the trail for them, nineteen centuries ago...."

"Yes," he smiled, "but it took the race a million years to learn how to use a stone axe."

II

One night, when Jean was in the kitchenette preparing a lunch for Bart and herself, the telephone rang. She said: "You answer it, Bart."

It was the Western Union operator, with a telegram for Jean. Bart wrote it down. "It's from Boonville," he said. "I'm afraid it's pretty bad news, dear."

Jean read: "Judson seriously ill. Come if possible."

It was signed, "John Boone".

Bart put his arm around her, tried to reassure her. "Maybe it isn't as bad as he thinks, Jean."

"It is--or he wouldn't have wired...."

"You'll want to go at once, of course."

She said tonelessly: "Yes...Can you drive me to Missoula tonight? I've been dreading something like that. I should have gone home last summer...."

"You weren't ready to go, and your father wouldn't have wanted you to," he said. "Shall I go with you, Jean?"

"You can't--your commencement's next week," she said. "But I dread going alone...More than I've ever dreaded anything, almost...But it's a part of my life I have to face..."

"You don't have to face it alone, though. I'm going with you. Young Martinson can handle the commencement. You start packing, dear--and I'll run over and see him. He came up to the movies with Mae Cronin."

He held Jean close for a few moments, and she clung to him. "We'll need some gas too," he said. "Shall I send a wire, that we're coming?"

"Yes, send it to--" she hesitated. "Send it to Mamma, Bart."

In Missoula, while he got their reservations and checked their baggage, Jean sent a telegram to her Uncle Sam and Aunt Sally, who were visiting Edythe's relatives-in-law in California.

When she and Bart were on the pullman, Jean said: "This is my first long trip on a train, Bart...I'd never been on one till I came to Montana. I'd never seen a motion picture or a play....The closest approach to a play was an emasculated performance of Hamlet, in the Corinth auditorium. Papa went with me to that--Mamma refused to. She said it was 'a degradation an' a belittlin' of righteousness', and that she would 'have no truck with it'."

Bart smiled. "Good for her! She had the courage of her convictions--when curiosity would have sidetracked 'em, for most people."

"Poor Mamma," she murmured. "I wonder how she's taking it about Papa....The almost unbelievable thing--and the inevitable one, of course--is that he should even be sick. Neither he nor Mamma have been before, since I can remember... I just can't picture his being helpless--or dead..."

Realizing sleep was impossible for her, Bart encouraged her to talk. "It isn't that I'm afraid of death for Papa, any more than I'm afraid of it for myself," she said. "It's the thought of--not being able to tell him anything...He gave me a trust, Bart. I want him to know I've tried to--to fulfil it."

"He does know it, dead. Your letters, and your articles in the 'National', have told him you have." He knew what she was thinking--that Judson might die still feeling his own life had been a failure.

"Papa wrote me about the articles," she said. "Dr. Boone did too. They must have talked them over....But it's so--so pathetic that Papa should need me to give his life meaning when it actually has meant so much to everybody around him.

"I tried to write him that it has....I reminded him of his being re-elected to his job year after year--that he has served most of his life as the unpaid legal advisor to the entire community--that everybody in Boonville loves and respects him....I just hope he can realize what all that means..."

Bart sent a telegram to Dr. Boone from Chicago. In Cincinnati he received an answer--that Judson was dead.

"I knew he would be, before we got there," Jean said quietly. "Poor Mamma....But Aunt Phronie will be with her--

and Dr. Boone....Papa wouldn't want me to grive for him, Bart. I'm not going to."

For the rest of the trip she was matter-of-fact about Judson's death. "Papa has solved the great 'to be or not to be' she said. "The part of him that made him Judson Taylor, of Boonville, was a force--manifested through his physical being....And now that it's separated from the worn-out mechanism--I just can't believe it has ceased to exist."

"It's doing so would contradict almost every known law in the Universe, it seems to me," he said. "A dynamo converts water power--gravity--into electrical energy. But neither the turbine nor the dynamo creates the energy. And it isn't lost when they wear out."

III

A tall young fellow was waiting to meet them when Jean and Bart got off the train at Marshall. "Howdy, 'Genie," he grinned, holding out his hand. "I'm little Alex MacLean. I reckon you don't remember me."

"Goodness--how could I ever forget you, Cousin Alex!" Jean exclaimed. "This is my husband, Bart Wilson--and I've told him about Ol' Mose. How's Mamma, Alex?"

"Aint Mary's tskin' it mighty well, 'Genie," he said as he shook hands with Bart. "I'm right glad to know you, sir," he added. "You've gone an' picked off for yourself my favorite cousin."

There was a crowd at the Taylor house when Alex stopped in front of it. Jean had known there would be--had dreaded seeing and talking to the Boonville people. The crowd, however,

meant the funeral would be held that afternoon.

Mary came down the porch steps--a grim, lonely figure; doing her duty to the child who had disobeyed her; who had not repented the disobedience. But Jean ran to meet her, put her arms around her--sobbed on her shoulder. The sight of her mother--alone--had done more to the girl than realization of her father's death; it had brought tears to her eyes.

Jean murmured: "Oh--Mamma, Mamma!"

"Jud Taylor's gone to meet his Maker, my child," Mary said. "He was not afraid to go. An' he's better off--far better off, 'Genie--than you an' me. I'll not grieve for 'im--for it was God's will....I know--I know, my child!--that he sits, right this minute, with the chosen ones of God!"

Jean said brokenly: "I--I'm not worrying about Papa... I--was thinking of you, Mamma."

"The same God that looks after Jud looks after all of us," Mary said. "I'm as well as usual, 'Genie. This must be your husband."

She held out her hand to Bart. "I felt I ought to come with her, Mrs. Taylor," he said. "I hated for her to make the long trip alone."

"You done right," Mary stated. "You're welcome to this house--as welcome as Jud Taylor would a-made you. Bring 'im in, 'Genie. You'll both want to clean up an' git ready for the funeral, I reckon. Your room's ready for you."

But the townspeople who had known Jean since she was a child crowded around her, shook hands with her and Bart. They called her by her first name, said a few quiet words of

condolence, as though she had never left Boonville. Phronie, however, wept on Jean's shoulder.

"Your Uncle Alex went year before last, 'Genie," she said. "Now Jud's gone--an' Mary an' me are left...But--the Lord giveth, an' He taketh away....Still, it's lonely--mighty lonely--without 'em..."

When Judson had written Jean of Alex's death, she had been grieved; but she had been glad she could not attend the funeral. Phronie would give way to her emotion, Jean had thought; and in the face of a professed belief in immortality, such a demonstration would be mawkishness....

Now Jean realized the juvenility of her assumption. Alex's death, to Phronie, had meant separation from her life-mate, the father of her children. And Judson's meant that--and more--to Mary....

As she thought of what it would mean to her to lose Bart, Jean clutched his arm almost desperately....Who was she to sneer at a bereaved wife for wanting human sympathy--the consolation of religion--any consolation she could get....

Bart talked to Phronie; Jean made her way through the crowded living room to the casket. Dr. Boone stood by it. He pressed her hand, muttered: "God bless you, 'Genie."

She said: "He looks natural--and peaceful--Dr. Boone."

The old man put his arm around her. "Jud lived a good life--an' he made a good end," he murmured. "God rest his soul...."

Jean remembered it was almost the same thing Eileen O'Byrne had said about her brother. "Yes--God rest his soul,

Doctor," she murmured. "That's all we can say--all we know to say....And I'm glad we can say it...."

After Reverend Ponder had shook hands with her, Jean and Bart went to her room. Mary came and knocked on the door.

"I see Little Alex put your things in here, 'Genie," she said. "There's a bathroom through that door--that used to be a window--at the end of the hall. Jud had it built after this town got runnin' water..."

She stopped and sniffed--then added gruffly: "You'll find towels--everyt ing you need, I reckon--on them shelves."

"Thanks, Mamma--don't worry about us," Jean said.

"Did Marion and--are they coming?"

"No, you're the only ones--the others sent telegrams," Mary said. "They've got families, 'Genie....But I did think Ransome would...."

She sniffed again. "Sam Taylor an' that woman he married are a-comin'," she said shortly. "But Joe Stivers--he started undertakin' since you left, 'Genie--he says we can't hold up buryin' Jud any longer." Then she added: "Still--it's a mighty long trip for folks their age to be makin'... I jest hope they'll have sense enough to see we've--done the best we could."

"They will," Jean assured her. "And they won't be any trouble when they get here, Mamma."

"Not to me, they won't," Mary said grimly. "God knows--an' they ought to know--I've got enough, as it is."

The funeral did not affect Jean as she had thought it would. People from all over the county came to it; the

little Boonville church was packed with them. Dr. Boone muttered--he sat with the family--that the services should have been held in the Corinth auditorium. The ones who could not find standing room inside the church waited outside--with bowed heads, as the pall bearers carried the casket through the lane which opened for its passage.

As she listened to the brief, earnest service, Jean realized that Judson's funeral, at least, was no 'relic of barbarism'--which she had declared all such services to be. It was the formalized tribute--the best, the deepest token of respect--which humanity has learned to pay to a life well lived....It was the tribute, too, of Judson's friends and neighbors--to a man who had been one of them, who had served them well, for almost a lifetime....

As the preacher spoke, Jean could feel Judson's presence there in the pew...Closing her eyes to keep back the tears, she could see his modest, deprecatory smile....

The Boonville Masonic lodge conducted a brief service at the grave. Jean noticed that Dr. Boone was not taking part in it, although she knew he was--or had been--a Mason. Kate Young's father had charge of the short ritual.

At the head of the grave he held up Judson's apron.

"This lambskin is an emblem of innocence--purity of heart--and the peculiar badge of a Mason," he said. "It is more ancient than the Golden Fleece or the Roman Eagle; and when worthily worn--as our brother has worn it--more honorable than the Star and Garter, or any other order which earthly power can confer. I now deposit it in the grave of our deceased brother."

Then he held up a sprig of cedar. He said: "This evergreen is an emblem of our enduring faith in the immortality of the soul. I now deposit it in the grave--as a pledge that we hope to meet our brother, Jud Taylor, in the Celestial Lodge above, where the Supreme Architect presides for ever."

Forming a single file, the Masons moved slowly around the grave, singing their dirge--to the tune of Pleyel's hymn--and each depositing his sprig of evergreen. Dr. Boone was the last one to do so. Jean could see that his eyes were wet with tears....

IV

Five years and nine months had passed since she had left Boonville, Jean thought later that afternoon. She sat with Mary and Phronie under the walnut tree. They had launched one of their familiar dialogues--had forgotten that she was there.

Mary was telling Phronie: "An' I said to Jud--'Jud Taylor,' I said, 'when I'm dead an' gone--if I go before you do--I don't want you a-settin' around grievin' for me'. An' he said, "Mary, I won't--an' I don't want you to be a-grievin' for me either'. An' I told him--"

"Land sakes!" Phronie exclaimed. "Them are the very same words I said to Alex, Mary. 'Alex MacLean,' I said--"

Jean smiled to herself at the familiar pattern--realized it contained a grief-anodyne, necessary to both of them....

Five years and nine months....

Boonville would remember tomorrow--if it had not already

remembered today--why she had left the place. It would compare her, as a woman, with the girl who had left five years before; it would compare Bart with Sam Baron--would wonder how she had managed to get Bart....

It would wonder over again--if it didn't already know--what had become of Sam; would ask itself if Jean had forgotten him--if she had forgotten Pinkie Santerre... It would conjecture whether or not she had told Bart about them, would wonder how he had reacted--or would react--to the information...

Yes, Jean thought, Boonville would dig up the whole thing again--and she didn't care if it did! She knew that Sam Baron could return to Boonville, without even having to face a manslaughter charge, because nobody would bring one against him. So the reasons which had driven her from the town had ceased to matter, actually--to anybody except the gossips....

She arose. "I'll get supper, Mamma," she said. "Dr. Boone's eating with us. If I need anything, I'll come and ask you about it."

Mary said: "All right, 'Genie. I don't mind if you do."

Bart and Little Alex had gone down town for cigarettes. The day was Saturday, and Mary had forgotten her week-end buying--for the first time in her life, Jean imagined. Bart and Little Alex returned while she was dictating a list to Jean.

"Tell them two boys to charge them things to me, 'Genie," she said--although the 'boys' were getting her instructions first-hand. "An' tell 'em to make that good-for-nothin' Louie

Goss give 'em a charge slip, too. If they don't jest stand over 'im an' make 'im, he's as like as not to charge them groceries to the Connors, or the Youngs. There never was a Goss that had a brain in his head--an' that Louie ain't no exception."

"All right, Mrs. Taylor," Bart smiled. "We'll handle Louie--just leave him to us."

"Well, I hope you do--I jest hope you do," Mary declared. "It's a misery to me, jest watchin' the way he does things--every time I go into that store."

While Bart and Little Alex were gone, Dr. Boone came into the kitchie, through the back door. He had left his car in the alley which had been cut through behind the barn. Jean had noticed that it ran where the old, vine-covered privy had stood.

She said: "I'm surprised to see you driving a car, Dr. Boone. I'd expected to find you still driving Ol' Prince."

"Well, I jest naturally had to pension Ol' Prince off," 'Genie," he said. That hoss was good for another ten year', too. But--dang my ol' hide!--I wasn't. Bein' passed up by every rattle-trap of a car on the road was just wearin' me down to a frazzle!"

Jean laughed. "What's become of Ol' Prince and Ol' Bunk?"

"They're both livin' off the fat o' the land--in Jud's pasture on Gabriel's Creek," he said. "Hammer Bill an' Lindy--an' all their kids--are livin' up there on that place now. I reckon you'll want to run up an' see 'em--an' the hosses too."

"I certainly will--and I'm going to."

"I never figgered you'd forgit the things--or people--that meant anything to you around here," he said. "You've got to be a fine, up-standin' woman, 'Genie--an' you can think, too." He chuckled. "Them articles you wrote in that magazine jest about floored Boonville."

"How did Papa feel about them?"

"I reckon he understood 'em better than you figgered he would. Jud was all right up to the day before I wired you--when he had the stroke that took 'im off, 'Genie. An' he boasted about them articles every time I saw him. He was proud as Punch over 'em."

She murmured: "I'm glad he was....What did Mamma think about them?"

He chuckled: "Well, Mary ain't exactly lavish in her praises of 'em. She said you'd know more about marriage an' such, after you'd had a few young-'uns o' your own to worry about."

Jean smiled at that. "Maybe I will. But--what does Boonville say about them, Doctor?"

"It doesn't--it don't speak with one voice, exactly," he said. "Dang it, 'Genie--you've got me sayin' 'doesn't'!"

"How terrible!" she laughed. "I never dreamed you'd be so amenable to suggestion."

"I ain't--it's jest the reversion of old age," he said. "But--a few figger them articles are good. Some wring their hands an' should they're contrary to God's teachin's--an' are downright sacrilege. An' the rest--they're the biggest bunch, 'Genie--jest don't understand 'em, an' figger they must be

bad for that reason. I hear that preacher-layout down at Corinth got all worked up about 'em."

"Good!" Jean smiled. "That means they're being talked about, anyway."

"They are," he assured her. "An'--dang my rotten ol' duodenum!--I wish you could go down there an' talk to that student-body about 'em! It 'ould make the ghost o' Cal Starke jest naturally come scramblin' out o' his grave!"

"Professor Starke was intelligent, though," she said thoughtfully. "It seems to me he might have understood them."

"Not in a million years!" he declared. "Starke's morals were Bible-made, an' yourn are based on evolution--which would have meant to Cal Starke that they've been spewed out o' the mouth o' Hell."

"Yes, I suppose you're right," she admitted. "The paradox about Professor Starke is that he was a force in the very evolution he hated so much. But he was a good man--a great man, I think--in spite of his prejudices."

"He was a great little man," the doctor corrected her. "An' that's a dam' sight better than bein' a little great man.. It took me longer than most folks live to learn that, 'Genie."

Jean wondered at the statement--saw the doctor's fine old hands tremble as he took out his pipe and filled it. But he did not choose to elaborate, and she did not question him.

"I've been worrying about Mamma," she said. "She'll never dream of coming to live with Bart and me--or with any of us, for that matter. But we can't just leave her alone here. What can we do about her, Doctor?"

"Not a dam' thing!" he chuckled. "Mary's her own boss. But it'll work itself out, 'Genie. Mary'll want Phronie to come an' live with 'er, I reckon. An' Phronie'll do it."

"Yes, Mamma will want that," Jean said. "But I wish Bart and I could be closer...Has Corinth changed much, Dr. Boone?"

For a moment she thought he was going to give one of his derisive 'haw-haw's', but he merely grunted, "Yes, Corinth has changed some...In a thousand years, I reckon--if it keeps on goin'--Corinth will be almost modern! But--it-ain't no place for you an' your husband, 'Genie."

"Corinth is funny--with the weight of the world on its shoulders," she said. "But you and Papa have lived here. And certainly, neither of your lives has been wasted here."

"Horse-manure--jest plain horse-manure!" he exclaimed. "Salve for an ol' man's vanity--or maybe you figger I've reached the age o' senility! I haven't--not yet!"

He stood up, shook his finger at her. "Git your mind to workin'!" he said. "It's me I'm talkin' about--Jud done the best he could, with the tools he had to work with. No man can do better..."

He looked at her for a moment, and said: "But you know--an' I know--I've wasted my life here!"

Jean was astonished at his vehemence. But he chuckled at her expression. "Don't take it so hard, honey," he said. "I'm not losin' sleep from vain regrets--at my age. An' I'm not blamin' myself for comin' here, or stayin' here...I had nobody to tell me I was a coward--so I prided myself that

I was a cynic...One who could see through the world--an' sneer at it....

"But we'll go into all that later," he told her. "I've got a few things I want to say to you, 'Genie, an' somethin' I want to give you. I give it to Jud Taylor to keep for me, a few weeks after you were born--an' I jest outlived 'im... Now I'm goin' to turn it over to you."

CHAPTER XXV

I

At supper Mary noticed the doctor's unwonted silence. She said: "You're lookin' peaked, John Boone. I reckon you ought to go right home after supper an' dose yourself with some o' your medicine."

"I'm all right, Mary."

"Well, you don't look it," she declared. "An' I guess you doctors can git sick, the same as anybody. If you've got mortal grain o' gumption, you'll do somethin' about it, before it gits worse."

"Never did have any gumption, Mary," he said. "That's a rare commodity."

After the meal, while she and Jean were clearing away the dishes, he came back into the dining room. He said. "I give Jud a sealed envelope to keep in his safe for me, Mary-- a long time ago. Would you mind gittin' it for me?"

"Well--I'll jest have to look up them numbers," she said. "Jud kept 'em upstairs in his desk somewhere."

While she was hunting for the combination to the safe, he said to Jean: "Could you come over to the office tonight, honey? Don't bring your husband. I jest want to talk to you."

"I'll borrow Little Alex's car, as soon as I've finished the dishes, " she promised.

Mary returned with the combination. Hunting through the safe she found the envelope, still sealed, where Judson had kept it for twenty-four years. The doctor took it, looked at it for a few moments.

"Did Jud ever tell you this envelope was in that safe, Mary?"

"No, he didn't. An' I didn't know it was there, either. What's in it, John Boone?"

"Nothin'--that matters now, I reckon....It's jest a will Jud helped me draw up."

Mary sniffed, looked at him searchingly. "John Boone, you're sick," she declared. "I've never known you to act the way you're a-actin'--in all my born days. You go home an' git some sleep--or whatever it is you need."

He chuckled mirthlessly, nodded to Jean, and went out through the kitchen. She could see that Mary was worried--and knew the reason. She said: "I'll go over to his house after we've finished the dishes. He may be getting the flu, or something."

Mary said gruffly: "You can do what you please, I reckon."

An hour later Jean knocked at his door, heard his familiar shouted "Come in!"

He sat with his feet propped on his desk. "Take that chair, 'Genie," he said. "My ol' legs don't unlimber the way they used to. You'll overlook my not gittin' up, I reckon."

Jean smiled, took the indicated seat. She glanced around the old office. It was a little less orderly, a little more

dingy than it had been, she noticed. The door of 'Jerry's' closet stood open, and the skeleton still hung by the neck; the doctor's microscope was on the table--when it should have been put away.

Dr. Boone watched her survey the room. "Yes, you're a fine, up-standin' woman--an' you've got brains," he said. "If you hadn't the brains, I wouldn't be tellin' you--what I'm a-goin' to tell you."

Jean waited for him to go on.

"You know I'm English, I reckon."

"Yes."

"I used to think--when I come to Boonville," he said, "that life was jest a survival o' the fittest, 'Genie.... That you took what you wanted--if you could git it--an' sneered at the ones who didn't. I thought the chief pleasure in life, to a man o' intellect, was sneerin'....I thought that meant he was survivin' mentally....This is a mighty funny world, honey."

She murmured: "But it's a reasonable world, Dr. Boone."

"To some, it is--yes, " he agreed. "But we'll git on with my tale, 'Genie. I reckon I'd better start with my dad....He was good middle-class folks--gentry. You know what that means. A feller inherits a little land, or a little money--an' never has to do anything but follow the pattern. Unless he happens to be a younger son, that is. Then maybe he gits out an' rustles, hopin' to start a cadet branch--that can go on followin' the pattern."

"My dad was a younger son. He went to SouthAfrica an' made some money in minin'. Then he come back to England--like they all want to do, I reckon--an' married a young wife. She was my mother, an' she died when I was born. Wasn't no need for that, either; but they didn't know much about obstetrics in them days....

"My father give me the best in the way of an education that England had to offer--an' I took it. He died while I was still up at Cambridge. I Had no other close relatives. Jest an uncle, an' a flock o' lazy, good-for-nothin' cousins. None of 'em mattered to me.

"I was graduated from the London College o' Physicians an' Surgeons. Then I went to Berlin an' Vienna...."

He got out his pipe and filled it. "I'm tellin' you all this," he said, "So you'll see why my life's been wasted. When I come to Boonville, I had jest about the best medical education a man could git at that time. An' I'd done a few things...But none of 'em matter now, I reckon..."

"When did you come to Boonville, Dr. Boone?"

"Jest a few months after Jud got back from goin' West with your Uncle Sam," he told her. "That was in the late 'Seventies. But I reckon you're more interested in why I come."

Jean smiled. "I am."

"Dang it, 'Genie--it's a trite yarn, except in spots," he said. "When I think back about it....But it's got a meanin'. That's why I'm tellin' it to you. An' there's a woman--women--in it, of course. Had you figgered that?"

She had. She said: "Nothing but a woman could account for you, Doctor."

"Well, she wasn't the only woman in my life," he admitted. "For all I know, I've got a few illegitimate children runnin' around in these hills. An' maybe a few in the Old Country, too. I hope I have, for I'd as much to give 'em as any other man who was likely to a-fathered 'em."

Jean laughed. "Doctor, your morals are--refreshing, to say the least!"

He chuckled. "I didn't have none, 'Genie--no more than a boar-hog!"

"What about the woman--the first one?"

"She had brains, looks--everything I wanted in a woman. I fell in love with her, as the sayin' goes...But it was more than that. I let 'er git into my mind. She jest took it over, I reckon."

"I can understand that."

He chuckled again. "It's funny now, when I look back on it....Do you know what that woman went an' done, 'Genie? Well, I'll tell you! We were a-goin' to git married, but she turned me down! She traipsed off an' married a sheep-faced curate in a Devonshire parish--because she wanted to help 'im 'do God's work'!

"'God's work'--in Twin Barrows!" he snorted. "In Boonville! When she could a-been helpin' me do it, for the whole world...I had somethin' to give the world...."

Jean murmured: "So that's why you came to Boonville."

"Yes. I jest slunk away from the world, like a houn'-dog

with its tail between its legs...She'd got to mean everything to me--an' I meant nothin' to her. It seemed to me that everybody was laughin' an' sneerin' at me--that nothin' meant anything. I wanted to git away from myself most of all, I reckon.

"I come over here, drifted around Richmond, Philadelphia, New York, for a while....But people kept laughin' an' sneerin' at me....Then somebody--I'd drifted down to Asheville--told me there was a little place back in the hills that needed a doctor. So I come to Boonville--an' found a place an' people I could laugh at myself. Boonville became my cynic's tub--an' I didn't want any lantern."

"But--you've done the best you could for Boonville, Dr. Boone."

"Yes, I reckon I have," he admitted. "An' the world o' medicine--creative medicine--has managed to stagger along without me, too. Maybe I'd a-ended up as jest another medical wind-bag, anyway....But there's another chapter to the story, 'Genie.'"

Jean looked at him and smiled. "I've already guessed it," she said. "You're my father, Dr. Boone."

II

He took a leather case from his desk, opened it and held out a small miniature painted on ivory. "Look at that, 'Genie.'"

Jean's eyes opened wide with amazement. "Goodness, Doctor--that might be a picture of me!"

"It might--but it happens to be a picture of my mother," he said. "How did you figger it out, 'Genie?'"

She said: "There was no other way of explaining Mamma. She's always considered me a penalty for her sins--a God-sent penalty...Poor Mamma..."

"Her life had stopped meanin' anything," he said. "You give it a meanin'--an' Jud's life, an' mine...."

"Did Papa--ever suspect the truth?"

"Jud might have--I jest don't know...I told him once that I'd wronged a man, an' that it had turned out good, for everybody...."

"What did he say, Doctor?"

"That he--that the wronged man--hadn't any right to hold it against me."

"And Mamma....She's never seemed to blame you," Jean said. "I just can't picture Mamma's having anything like that happen to her."

"Why shouldn't it have happened to 'er?" he demanded. "Mary was human--an' a damned attractive woman, 'Genie. She hadn't had a child for nineteen years, but she was still vigorous. Jud--well, he jest hadn't been, since Marion was a baby."

"So that was it...."

"Only a part of it. Mary wanted to be 'true' to Jud. If he'd been normal--she wouldn't have had an affair with the angel Gabriel!" He chuckled. "I know--I tried 'er out, 'Genie. An' she was human enough not to hold it against me."

Jean couldn't understand that either. She said: "I guess I've just never known Mamma."

"Not if you figger that shocked her," he grinned. "It

done 'er good. A think like that flatters a woman, if she's got brains enough to see it. Mary did have. An' it give 'er a dam' good excuse for feelin' virtuous, too. Women like Mary, in places like Boonville, don't git that very often."

"But they need it....And Papa had got to taking her for granted, I suppose. Poor Mamma..."

"Mary was--jest human," he said. "After Marion got married, she was alone there most of the time. Jud would go back to the court house after supper, or to his ol' law office. An' he had to spend quite a few nights in Asheville an' Marshall, at trials an' meetin's. He could a-taken Mary with 'im--but he didn't."

"No," Jean murmured; "Papa never did take her when he went places."

"Well, one night I saw Jud leavin' for Asheville," he said. "I got called on a baby case to California Creek, an' as I come back I saw Mary's light still a-burnin'. I went on home an' left the buggy; then I come back an' knocked on the back door.

"Mary come an' opened it. She said: 'What do you want, John Boone?'"

"'You're alone, an' I'm alone, Mary,' I said. 'It jest don't make sense.'

"She said: 'No, it don't. Come in, John Boone'."

That was like Mary, Jean thought. Mary must have felt that her life was slipping away from her; and having no reasoned standard of morals, merely feelings, she had allowed her emotions to overcome her scruples. And Mary had always

shaped her morals, as well as her religion, to suit herself, anyway.

"But wasn't she afraid--of the consequences?" she asked. "Mamma must have known she could still have a baby."

"She hadn't had one, for nineteen year'," he reminded her. "When I told her she still could have one, she said: 'If I do--it's the Lord's will.' Mary jest figgered it was a trade, 'Genie. She was sinnin' knowin' ly an' wittin'ly; an' whatever the price was, she was willin' to pay it."

"Were you willing for her to pay it? She wouldn't have had to, of course."

He lighted his pipe again, with maddening deliberation, it seemed to Jean--until she saw that his hand was trembling. And that, she realized, was not merely because of old age.

"I've lived a long time, 'Genie," he said. "Long enough to know the mistakes people make go back to ignorance. Even the deliberate, malicious crimes you read about in the papers--up to, an' includin' the wars nations wage against each other--are caused by ignorance. To my way o' thinkin', it's the one big 'evil' in the world."

"If people could realize that, " she said, "we could stop fighting wars--and fight ignorance."

"We could," he agreed. "It was ignorance that drove me to Boonville. They call that kind an 'obsession' now. An' they know that one of 'em breeds a lot of others. All of 'em are swaddled in ignorance."

"I've told you how the idea that made me run away from England bred the one that nothin' meant anything. An' the

thought that I was smart enough to see that nothin' meant anything, when nobody else could, flattered my vanity. It made ~~me~~ mean somethin'--to myself--again. I could sneer at Boonville. I did--an' the more I sneered, the more things I found to belittle. So I got to believin' in nothin'--except myself.

"When a man reaches that stage, 'Genie,' he said, "the man jest naturally becomes a law unto himself. No judgment o' God or man, except his own, has any meanin' to him...."

"Yes--I can see that, " Jean murmured.

"An' sometimes we doctors git to thinkin' we're jest about God, anyway," he said. "We do have power over life an' death, to a degree; an' we're used to usin' it....As I got older, I started wantin' a child. One I could know was my own--an' with a mother who could give it sand an' bottom...

"Mary Taylor's got more o' them than any other woman I've ever known. She's got brains, too--she's jest never learned how to use 'em....I figgered, you might say, that I was so damned important I owed it to myself to perpetuate myself, 'Genie. I let Mary have you deliberately...."

"So--I wasn't a 'biological accident' after all...."

"No--but Jud Taylor's been your father, in every sense except the actual blood-relationship," he said. "I've envied him that....Your bein' born didn't hurt him an' Mary. It done 'em good--give 'em somethin' to live for.

"An' it give me somethin' to live for too," he stated.

"I jest had to hang around Jud an' Mary, so I could see you... An' I got to knowin' 'em....Jud Taylor never done a malicious thing to another human bein' in his life. An' Mary.....You

can argue with her--git mad enough at 'er to hate 'er-- but you can't sneer at 'er....I reckon you an' your folks jest made a human bein' outa me again, honey."

"And you don't regret--any of it?"

"Hell--no!" he chuckled. "I'm an unregenerate ol' bastard--but I'm not a hypocrite! Why should I regret it--when it turned out good?"

He looked at her for a moment. "You're the result of it, 'Genie," he said. "You've married a good man, an' you'll have good children....You've got a lot of me in you--an' a lot of Mary.. You'll pass that on to your children...I jest wish I could hang around long enough to see 'em. An'--dang my ol' duodenum--I may do that! You an' that husband o' yours git busy!"

Jean smiled. "We've--been busy," she admitted. "I'm already pregnant, Dr. Boone....And I owe my very existence to you," she told him. "Next to Papa--he'll always be that to me--I've always loved and respected you, like another father....I didn't know the person you used to be--but I do know that he was sick mentally. Ignorance, a few wrong ways of looking at things, can do that to people."

"You were pretty sick yourself, when you left here, 'Genie."

"I stayed that way for over four years," she said. "Bart cured me."

III

"But there's another thing you ought to know," he said. "When Mary learned she was a-goin' to have you, I tried to get her to go away with me. She could have got a divorce in Utah--or one o' them Western states--an' we could a-been married. But she wouldn't do it, 'Genie. She figgered what Jud didn't know wouldn't hurt 'im--an' if she left him, that would jest about kill 'im."

"It would have. Papa would have gone to pieces, because he'd have had nothing left to live for."

"That's the way Mary figgered it, an' I could see she was right," he said. "What we'd done--it was adultery, a crime against human obligations in general, an' against Jud in particular--can be judged in two ways, as I see it. One is from the standpoint o' man-made morals; the other is in terms o' God's own laws."

"Just how do you mean that last one, Doctor?"

"Natural laws--the ones God made to run the human race, an' don't violate Himself," he said. "I did remember a thing or two, 'Genie. I knew I had somethin' worth givin' to a child in the way o' mental an' physical heritage--an' I knew Mary had. Because we didn't violate any o' the natural laws o' good heredity, the results turned out good. Do you see what I mean?"

"Yes," she murmured, "I do, Doctor....God actually judged you--and Mamma--on the basis of His own laws. His judgments are inexorable; they are in terms of results--they come as results."

"They do--an' that's justice," he said thoughtfully. "We human bein's are still learnin' from our trial-an'-error justice--from our mistakes....An' God's judgments, as they always have been, will keep on bein' the results o' man's behavior--what he actually does, rather than what he figgers he ought to do."

He opened a drawer of his desk and took out the envelope he had given Judson twenty-odd years before. "I made this out a few days after you were born, 'Genie," he said. "It's been in Jud's safe ever since--till Mary got it out for me tonight."

"At first I meant it to be a boast--to Boonville an' the rest o' the world--that ol' John Boone had left one o' his own flesh-an'-blood to keep on doin' his sneerin' for him when he was gone....But I couldn't write that, even then....

"It's jest a will, honey, " he told her. "A lonely, ol' man leavin' what he's got to--the child of a friend.... To a child he brought into the world...."

IV

Bart and Mary were still up when Jean returned. "Dr. Boone and I just got to talking. He's all right, Mamma," she said. "You shouldn't have waited up for me."

Mary said: "I wanted to talk to you, 'Genie."

Bart got up. "Well, I think I'll hit the hay," he yawned. "Good night, Mrs. Taylor."

"It's pretty late thought," Jean said. "Can't it wait till tomorrow, Mamma?"

"No," Mary said grimly, "it can't wait. An' I reckon

your husband had better stay an' hear it."

Both Jean and Bart, for different reasons, were surprised at the statement; but it had the finality of an imperative. Bart sat down and lit a cigarette; Jean took off her coat and sat down too.

"When I read them articles you wrote, 'Genie,' Mary stated, "I wondered what you'd think if you knowed you're John Boone's bastard--an' your own-born mother's an adulteress!"

Bart stared at her. The statement was in no sense an apology--it sounded like an accusation.

Jean said quietly. "I did suspect Dr. Boone was my father, when I wrote the articles, Mamma. I know now that if he hadn't been, you wouldn't have had another baby--and I wouldn't even be in existence."

"No, you wouldn't. Jud Taylor--he jest couldn't a-fathered you."

"You've always thought of me as the penalty for what you did," Jean said. "But I'm glad to be one--and I'm glad to be a bastard. Instead of blaming you and Dr. Boone, I'm utterly grateful to you--for giving me a chance to live, a healthy body, and whatever of yourselves you've passed on to me, Mamma.

"And I know," she added, looking at Bart, "that you feel that way too, dear."

"I do," he said. "I love Jean, Mrs. Taylor; and I'm proud of her--for being the woman she is. You've every reason to feel proud of her. The fact that she's illegitimate--

just doesn't matter. As she says, you and Dr. Boone gave her everything that does matter."

"Well, I never thought to hear you say them words, 'Genie--or him either," Mary said. "I thought you'd throw it in my face--as a shame an' a reproach....I thought you'd say--in them fine words you used--that I'd violated the sanctity o' Jud Taylor's home! An' by doin' it--I'd jest made myself no better than a common strumpet by the roadside!"

"An' if you had--an' if you had, 'Genie Taylor," she exclaimed, "I was jest a-goin' to tell you a few things!"

Jean smiled. "What were you going to tell me, Mamma?"

"I was jest a-goin' to ask you, 'Genie Taylor, if you'd ever lived with a man--like you've been livin' with him--home or no home, children or no children--an' then have to go on sleepin' in the same bed with 'im--after he'd stopped bein' a man!"

"An' I was a-goin' to ask you," she stated, "seein' you had it all worked out--if you'd git up an' leave that man, so you could have another one, when he'd done the best he could by you--an' was as helpless as a new-born young'un without you!"

"I'll answer that, " Bart said. "If anything like that happened to me, Mrs. Taylor--if Jean wasn't willing to get a divorce from me--I'd want her to do as you did. And if she had a child by the other man, I'd assume the responsibility for it--gladly."

"Well, I buried Jud Taylor this day," Mary said. "I'd wronged 'im--when he done the best he could....But I knowed

he'd jest a-been hurt if I told 'im--to think I'd wronged 'im, an' to think you were somebody else's child...He jest about worshiped you, 'Genie."

Jean said: "I know he did, Mamma...."

But there was more to it than that, Jean thought.... Mary had sneered at Sally Taylor for being the daughter of a saloon keeper, had inferred that Sally was a prostitute before Sam married her. And Jean remembered that Phronie 'could a-knocked Mary down with a feather' when Trixie 'played out'....All through the years--with her own child to remind her that she herself had violated the sex-code--Mary had been quick to judge, quick to condemn....

But she was expecting her mother to be logical, Jean realized--when Mary knew only the common sense of expediency.

"I tried to make it up to Jud," Mary said. "An' I done the best I knew by you, 'Genie. I was afraid--mighty afraid--you'd be branded with the wickedness that was in me....I hated it--an' I hated myself for bein' a hypocrite. But I jest knew it was better to be one than to hurt Jud Taylor."

"Yes, I think you did right about that," Bart said. "You couldn't have benefited anybody by telling him--and you would have hurt everybody concerned."

Obviously, Mary had reconciled herself with God--and the Ten Commandments, Jean thought. Mary explained that too.

"Well--it's past an' gone," she stated. "God made me suffer, 'Genie. An' I reckon He visited my sins on you.... But you haven't judged me for it. An' God knows--an' Jud Taylor knows, where he's a-sittin' right this minute!--that

I done the best I could....If God hadn't a-meant for me to have you--I jest wouldn't a-had you. So I still say: 'His will be done'!"

After Jean and he had gone to bed, Bart chuckled thoughtfully. "Hellp, Jean--she has all the answers!" he said. "And they aren't so damned different from the ones you and I would give. Did you notice that?"

"Yes, I noticed it....Mamma still thinks in terms of her 'Rock of Ages'--even if she did have to chip off the Seventh Commandment."

"But she didn't chip it off--she didn't even scar it," he denied. "God sent her punishment, she accepted it--and the books are closed! You just can't beat a combination like that."

"Yes--and Mamma escaped the disapproval of society," Jean said. "But she justified her escapint it--with the 'greatest good to the greatest number' philosophy. And God's willing me to be born actually was a natural law, the mating instinct....So God had to provide her with a special dispensation to commit adultery, with the nominal penalty of making her suffer. But Mamma didn't suffer very much, Bart. She'd already decided the whole thing was God's will, and had accepted it as such."

"But she isn't a hypocrite; she's convinced it was God's will," he said. "So what's wrong with her philosophy--and her religion--so long as it enables her to survive mentally?"

"Nothing--for her. And Mamma does believe it--utterly," Jean admitted. "But she would survive mentally with any

religion or philosophy...And the joke's on me, I guess. She's made me another rib-woman--like Eve--the caprice of Deity, who meddles in human affairs!

"And if she'd needed to--for her own mental security," Jean declared, "Mamma would have given me a 'virgin birth'--and would have believed that utterly too. I'd rather be an honest bastard, Bart--begotten of honest human passions, that scorn to ask Deity for the right He's already given them!"

Bart laughed, "Hell--your mother did better than that by you," he assured her. "She had her 'honest human passions'--the quota of 'em she's passed on to you, Jean, along with the will to survive mentally. And she didn't ask Deity for the right to satisfy 'em, either. She did it in the fact of Deity and damnation--and then made God Himself justify her!"

The End.